

It's Venomous You Dumbass

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/40311057) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/40311057>.

Rating:

Teen And Up Audiences

Archive Warning:

Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Category:

Gen

Fandom:

Naruto (Anime & Manga)

Relationships:

Jiraiya & Orochimaru & Tsunade (Naruto), Orochimaru (Naruto) & Original Character(s), Namikaze Minato & Original Character(s), Nara Shikaku/Original Female Character(s)

Characters:

Orochimaru (Naruto), Original Female Character(s), Namikaze Minato, Jiraiya (Naruto), Tsunade (Naruto), Nawaki (Naruto), Original Hyuuga Character(s), Uzumaki Kushina, Nara Shikaku, Other Naruto Character(s)

Additional Tags:

Isekai OC, Good Orochimaru (Naruto), Parental Orochimaru (Naruto), Sensei Orochimaru (Naruto), BAMF Orochimaru (Naruto), Protective Orochimaru (Naruto), Hokage Orochimaru (Naruto), Maybe - Freeform, Original Character(s), sorta sioc, Self-Insert, kinda sorta, Namikaze Minato Lives, Senju Nawaki Lives, Swearing, Fluff, Slice of Life, Hurt/Comfort, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, I'm not sure how to tag, rewrite of an older fic, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, second and third war era, Second Shinobi War, Third Shinobi War, Team as Family, the sannin are all disasters and we love them for it, Snakes, Fix-It of Sorts, Fix-It, Isekai, Reincarnation, Alternate Universe - Reincarnation

Language:

English

Series:

Part 1 of [Venom and Other Anecdotes](#)

Collections:

[Naruto FF](#), [Favorite Self-Insert and OC-Centric Fanfics](#)

Stats:

Published: 2022-07-15 Completed: 2024-04-07 Words: 66,080

Chapters: 20/20

It's Venomous You Dumbass

by [xo_QueenieVee_xo](#)

Summary

Tsuyuko hopes she will be able to save him from himself. Because here and now this is a man she is proud to call her teacher and she would hate having to void that feeling in her heart.

There was no hint of evil in the man yet. If anything, all he currently was, was curious. Curiosity wasn't an inherently bad trait, it had the potential to become that but right now it wasn't. She hopes it stays this way. That neither his or her own curiosity comes back to bite them.

(But Did You Die? rewrite)

Notes

Aight yall it's official, I am rewriting But Did You Die? I hope you enjoy <3

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

You know what they say about curiosity...

~..~

Tsuyuko is barely four years old when her life crumbles to pieces. The hand in her own is horribly cold and splotted with bruises and blisters. She doesn't look at her guardian's face knowing it won't be pretty. Disease showed no mercy, it took no prisoners. It left only death and agony in its wake. It pillaged and destroyed until nothing and no one remained.

Something glaring across her vision pulls her out of the thought. But she's not present, the face before is a blur of barely illuminated features that she doesn't bother to make out.

"Are you infected?" Their voice is calm, calculated, something about it is pinging in a familiarity that she cannot place just yet. Tsuyuko shakes her head at the question. She'd taken great care to keep herself isolated when people started getting sick. For all of four she was in appearance, her mind was far older and the doctor in her recognized the signs of a deadly virus as soon as it started.

Tsuyuko has watched from afar the people of the small village die slow agonizing deaths. Deaths that didn't spare her caretaker who despite doing everything to stay away from the rest of the village found themselves unwell. She considers the newcomer's question, considers days of ravenous fever, watching them not being able to keep anything down, watching someone she considered family die from a far because engaging with them would only cause her own downfall.. And Tsuyuko wasn't ready to die again. It had been trying, but she knew how to be around those sick on deathbed.

"No. She passed the spread point a few days ago. This is the first time I've.." Tsuyuko glanced around the room, it was a testament to how those last few days have gone. She finds solace in staring at her feet.

"I see. Come on then, you can't stay here child." They pull her along, with a cold type of care that feels clinical in nature. Tsuyuko finds comfort in the familiarity of clinical care.

"You have to burn everything." She mutters, knowing good and well it's the only way to make sure the disease doesn't spread via animals

or wanderers.

“I do.”

“Was there anyone else?” She doesn’t think there could be, not with how quickly everything happened.

“Unfortunately not. You are very lucky.”

“....luck isn’t what I’d call it.”

“I suppose not.” Their tone is ever just slightly off.

“Shinobi-san?” It’s a deduction she’s making in the dark, because the person beside her doesn’t feel like a regular villager. In this world there were civilians and shinobi, and when you saw enough pass through you learned to pick them out. She is however glad they don’t seem inclined to explain how she came to that guess.

It would be really inconvenient to explain the blur over their face and how she can’t make out any details currently due to how her head feels like its going to split open any moment from what she knows is a migraine induced from mild dehydration.

“Hmm?”

“What happens now?” Tsuyuko doesn’t fight when suddenly she is being scooped up. They feel trustworthy enough.

“I was instructed to bring any survivors for treatment in Konoha.” Distaste lingers on their tongue like an old pain one wished to do away with. Tsuyuko hums. She can put two and two together easily enough.

“I see.”

“And what’s that child?”

“Cannon fodder.” She mumbles, finding herself the longer carried the tireder she becomes. It’s hard watching people die.

“You are a peculiar child aren’t you.”

“You sound like a peculiar adult.”

“Sound? Are you blind?”

“No, you're fuzzy right now, my head hurts.” The shinobi stops walking. They seem to take a moment to consider. Tsuyuko feels something warm on her forehead. After a moment her vision clears, and when her eyes begin to focus she realizes why they sounded so familiar.

She pokes the haitai on his forehead. It's the swirling leaf symbol she knew belonged to the Konoha. Not the one he was originally introduced with. Looks like she knows where in the timeline she is now. Lovely.

“Better?”

“Your eyes are very yellow.” She mutters, finding herself quite stuck staring into snake eyes. The shinobi chuckles. It's an interesting sound. Could she make him laugh again?

“Some could say the same about you, child. What is your name?” He questions, and for some reason it feels like a test.

“It's rude to ask for someone's name without first introducing yourself Shinobi-san. My eyes are green.” The dark haired man smiles, it's not sinister or cruel, if anything it reminds her of how her guardian used to smile whenever she did something worth being proud over.

“You may call me Orochimaru.”

“I'm Tsuyuko, Orochimaru-san.”

“Let's get you to Konoha then Tsuyuko-chan.”



In konoha she is treated in a hospital, by both doctors and shinobi medics alike before being cleared of any signs of the disease that wrought her little village to the ground. Orochimaru leaves her in the hands of the hospital staff and bids her farewell.

For some reason, his departure saddens her. She wishes him well in his endeavors, and perhaps hopes for a better future for the man who saved her (*she knows good and well that had she been left in the village, had he not checked all the homes, she would have burned with the rest of them*) .

Tsuyuko is ushered inside the orphanage and immediately introduced to her new roommate. An older boy with bright blonde hair and striking sky blue eyes, he smiles kindly and welcomes her into the home. She latches on instantly, his kind hearted nature is a bright flame that she can't help but to orbit towards.

Orochimaru does not expect to see the peculiar child again. Not in any official capacity of the term, of course there are few times when he may check in on the tyke from afar (*he cannot explain why he does this, just that he feels he must*) . She is doing well, even seems to have latched on to another child in the orphanage. He has no sort of hope for her career as a shinobi, she is far too emotional and frankly clumsy... but there is a sense of thinly veiled intelligence and curiosity behind warning green eyes that he can't ignore.

Eyes that have seen too much, know things well beyond their years. *I see. Cannon fodder.*

Needless to say he is quite curious as to what the child will become in time. She is smart, perhaps too smart, and more importantly she is curious and clever. He wants to see where that takes her.

As it turns out, an early graduation. Far earlier than what should be allowed for someone her age, but during these times... Orochimaru finds himself saddled with a student, one for now until Tsunade's younger brother graduates and he has to make due on a bet he lost some years ago.

...

Tsuyuko takes the graduation exam early on a whim, as does Minato. A whim caused by severe boredom that having to repeat school in any capacity would cause and the fact that the horribly lit classroom gives her horrible migraines. Chakra theory wasn't something hard to learn or pick up, and really anything in comparison to her thesis on infectious disease at this point was child's play, chakra was just biology with an extra step (*an extra step that mind you was more spiritual than anything physical, but why let the limitations of the mind hinder the progress of the body*). She is not expecting to actually be allowed to pass the exam considering her age of only eight. Of course considering the circumstances of the world around them...

She should have known better.

There was too much unrest in the world to give a damn about the age of children they sent to fight their battles.

Something warm, the familiar hum of iryoninjutsu and the green hue she's come to associate with warning yellow snap her out of her head.

Tsuyuko blinks slowly to find the snake sannin's eyes on her. He's crouching in front of her, his hand on her forehead. Slowly she reaches up and pokes the center spiral of his haitai. There is a flicker of something that is almost a smile across his expression and she counts it as a tiny victory.

He has a very nice smile. It morphs into an exasperated sigh.

"Somehow your hair has become more of a mane than the last time I saw you child." He tugs at a strand of her hair, and she will agree with that. Her hair was.. Well frankly it was absurd. The poor matrons at the orphanages hadn't a clue what to do with her curls and really neither had she. Not currently with what little she has.

For now however she pins the sannin with an annoyed look. Tsuyuko briefly contemplated sticking her tongue out for effect. But it probably wouldn't impress a snake summoner in any notion of the word.

"It's nice to see you again, Orochimaru-san. But what are you doing here?" He ignores her question as he continues whatever it is he is doing with his glowing green hand upon her forehead. His brows knit together after a moment.

"Did you have this headache when your academy sensei was passing out student assignments?" He does not sound like he is impressed with the notion. Tsuyuko considers how long she has had this headache for now.

Longer than she'd like that's for certain. It hadn't been made any better by the arrival of one Uzumaki Kushina in their class earlier in the month either. Tsuyuko did her best to stay away from the loud redhead, preferring to stay close to Minato and the rest of their friends. Unfortunately here lately the Uzumaki girl seemed insistent upon fighting Minato over their shared goal of Hokageship and well frankly Tsuyuko had not the time for that. Needless to say she'd been spending more time with the others and only really interacting with Minato at the orphanages.

Tsuyuko pulls her hand away from Orochimaru's haitai and in turn pinches the bridge of her nose despite how it will push at his hand on her head.

"Oh, um, yeah? Itoka-sensei talks too much and for too long- I wasn't listening. The light in the classroom is really bad and it always makes my head hurt." She admits after a moment of thinking. Since she can't

pinpoint when this headache started. Might as well offer why it stayed. Orochimaru only chuckles at her.

“Tell me Tsuyuko-chan, do you find your sensei’s boring?” He sounds far too amused to be just a simple question. The thing is though.

Tsuyuko finds most teachers boring. It’s not isolated to Itoka-sensei, even if he is her main teacher.

“I haven’t learned anything new since I started the academy, I read a book on chakra theory at the orphanage and since then have just been utterly bored.” There should have been so many new things with the introduction of chakra and its applications. But sadly beyond the book she borrowed from one of the older kids because the kids books bored her. School has thus far taught her nothing new or even anything that would help her survive the war (*both the one they were in now and the ones to come after*) .

Orochimaru takes a moment to consider her response. His expression is too hard for her to pick apart, and she’s not going to try knowing it will only be headache inducing. As her headache is starting to clear due to whatever magic he is working she does not want to inflict another.

“Interesting. Do you like learning Tsuyuko-chan?”

“Knowledge is power, Orochimaru-san.”

“From now on child, it’s sensei.” He tells her matter of fact, and Tsuyuko finds herself smiling.

“Hai Orochimaru-sensei.”

There is one downside to graduating early and starting a sorta apprenticeship. Tsuyuko has to leave Minato behind, and by behind she means that he too gets placed in an apprenticeship with a certain injured sannin and the two end up living with their respected technical guardians. After years of sharing a room at the orphanages, well she was going to miss constantly being around her best friend, and really her older brother figure.

Of course this entire range of thought is had before Orochimaru reveals that he and Jiraiya co own a medium sized estate. Which is

frankly bizarre, she did not remember that from the manga. Orochimaru tells her that legally the home is his, and the only reason he lets Jiraiya stay with him is because with his teammates career path him renting an apartment or living alone was just illogical and a waste of a room.

Tsuyuko blatantly thinks it's because despite what Orochimaru-sensei admits to, he does actually care about his teammate. Also Tsuyuko thinks her sensei needs to reexamine his definition of medium. She contemplates pointing out that this estate is in fact not medium but rather large. Instead she focuses on the fact that for now it is still just her and her sensei.

"Minato-kun will not be joining us until Jiraiya is cleared by Tsunade to leave the hospital." Orochimaru explains as they enter the house. Tsuyuko slips out of her bright yellow shinobi sandals and Orochimaru slips off his own dark blue one.

It is at that moment she notices his nails both for hands and feet are painted. Would he paint her nails if she asked? Tsuyuko files that question away for later.

"Orochimaru-sensei, how did he get hurt?" Instead of asking the most pressing question about if or if not the sannin will paint her nails, she asks what she needs to. Orochimaru sighs, he pats her head with a forlorn sadness that she cannot explain.

"He is a fool who tries to fight gods twice his size." Tsuyuko considers everything she knows, the things she knew before and the things she's learned in the last few years. She contemplates something very seriously.

There was a very good chance she was going to watch all of them die, even knowing what she does and not being able to do a damn thing about it. Not be able to save the people right in front of her from time and themselves.

"He's not going to teach Minato-nii to be reckless too is he?" Orochimaru sighs, he glances away. Tsuyuko thinks he won't answer until he shakes his head.

"Tsunade will not allow him to do that Tsuyuko-chan." He tells her in a way that is almost reassuring.

"But not you?" She follows after Orochimaru as he walks them through the home. *(Tsuyuko does not know that in that moment*

Orochimaru compares her to a duckling and internally scoffs at the thought.)

“I garner the feeling I will have my hands tied with you child. Come along, pick a room on the right wing of the house as that is my side.” He gestures to where the great room split off into a hallway, ignoring the hallway on the other side completely and if with a bit of distaste.

“Did you and Jiraiya-san split the house down the middle? Minato and I did that for a while when all his scrolls got everywhere. It doesn’t work very well, the scrolls still found their way on my side of the room.” Orochimaru rolls his eyes at her. Tsuyuko grins.

“Something of the sort. I see that your friend shares my teammates’ love of scrolls.” She can only shrug. Love is definitely one word for it.

“Minato thinks fuinjutsu is fascinating.”

“But not you?” Orochimaru echoes her early question, Tsuyuko glances around the hall. It’s sparsely decorated, it feels more clinic-like than homelike and she will be changing that very soon.

“I think that there are better ways to spend one’s time with research.” She tells him after a moment. Deciding that Orochimaru probably already had speculations about her intellect and well she wasn’t going to be hiding that part of herself any longer.

“Pray tell Tsuyuko-chan.” He stops, crouching to her level. Tsuyuko meets his curious gaze head on.

“I dunno sensei, I feel like learning how to cure and or weaponize certain diseases would be more beneficial than throwing ninjutsu across the field at someone just doing what they’re told.” It would at least be far more efficient in killing their enemy before said enemy was able to harm her people. Orochimaru considers her.

“Tell me, do you have interest in iryoninjutsu Tsuyuko-chan?” She shrugs, there was a doctor inside her somewhere, but only being someone who heals will not help her here. In order to save, well she would also have to be prepared to destroy. Oaths follow you to your grave and she has to leave her last life behind, she cannot swear to do no harm here.

It simply wasn’t realistic.

“Probably not in the same sense as your other teammate sensei.” Of

course she doesn't know this for fact she hasn't actually met Tsunade and only knew of her based on stories and things Orochimaru himself has said about the Senju matron.

"You really are a peculiar child." He pats her head before standing back up. Tsuyuko huffs at him.

"Normal is overrated Orochimaru-sensei."

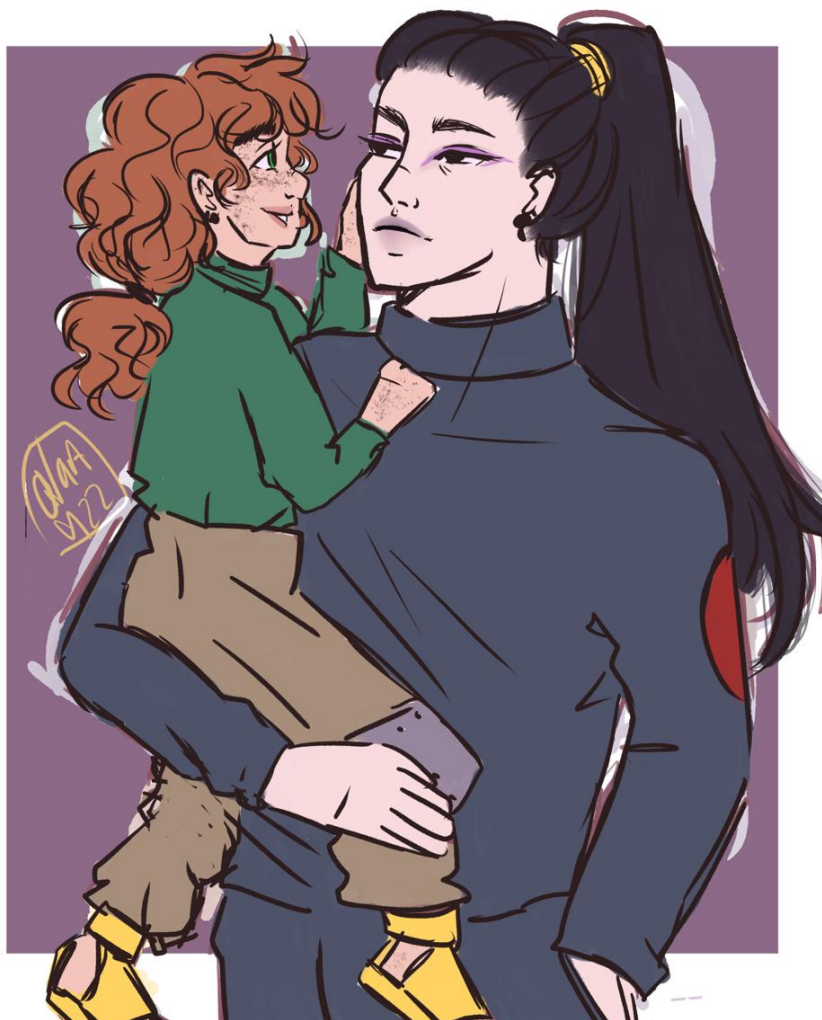
"Pick a room child. This is your home for the foreseeable future."

Tsuyuko picks the room two doors down from Orochimaru. It has a window that overlooks the back garden. She makes a mental note to get seeds for plants she knows can be used in poison.

Orochimaru cooks them dinner, something simple and full of protein. He informs her they will be going for outfitting in the morning and then bypassing d-ranks for a test of her intellect- which despite how he grins when he says this she is oddly looking forward to. Tsuyuko hopes she will be able to save him from himself. Because here and now this is a man she is proud to call her teacher and she would hate having to void that feeling in her heart.

There was no hint of evil in the man yet. If anything, all he currently was, was curious. Curiosity wasn't an inherently bad trait, it had the potential to become that but right now it wasn't. She hopes it stays this way. That neither his or her own curiosity comes back to bite them.

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(Tsuyuko and Orochimaru, idk if this was the original picture I had here, but eh..)

There is no satisfaction in death..

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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Jiraiya spends a solid three minutes gaping at the conversation he has the misfortune to overhear first thing that morning. His teammate's new student (*who vaguely reminds him of a kunoichi he knew*) is sitting on the countertop next to the stove kicking her sock covered feet while Orochimaru cooks. It would be adorable if the two weren't talking about weaponizing anthrax.

"Well this is a lovely conversation to walk into." He mutters and two sets of warning eyes land on him. Orochimaru smirks at him and the little girl flips the switch so fast that she's nearly falling off the counter to greet him with a loud exuberant smile.

Minato had said his friend was nice. If a bit odd.

"Jiraiya-san! You're all better!" She sounds genuinely happy about that too, and he really can't help but to smile back at her. Jiraiya rubs the back of his head, the motion doesn't hurt him as it had in the past few weeks.

"Heh, mostly so, free to move about the village for now. So why ya want to weaponize anthrax, kid?" He watches as the kid and Orochimaru share an amused look before she turns back to him. Orochimaru cracks a few eggs into the wok, while simultaneously stirring a pot of rice behind the wok.

The kid fucking shrugs at him.

"The war outside the walls is probably enough of a reason." Orochimaru intones and his little apprentice nods her head like a dutiful duckling. It's so ridiculous that he snorts. Jiraiya considers for a moment letting it slip what he's heard. Except these two seem so damn happy about the idea of violence without physical exertion that he hates to ruin their fun.

He'll tell Orochimaru about the whispers he's been hearing later, once little ears have gone to bed.

"Are you joining us for breakfast Jiraiya-san?"

"He is. As is Tsunade. Grab the plates Tsuyuko-chan." She does as told, in a completely unconventional manner by standing on the counter and pillaging through the shelves behind her head until four plates are obtained. Orochimaru lets her.

Which is frankly just as bizarre as the conversation he walked in on.

"Mmkay. When will we pick up Minato? I miss him and his stupid scrolls." She pushes right on through sitting back on the countertop and tucking her legs under her like in lotus. Orochimaru barely spares her an unimpressed look.

"After breakfast, as we have already discussed. Or were you not listening again?" The child shrugs.

"Head hurts." Jiraiya watches as Orochimaru stops everything he's doing to reach over and run a diagnostic jutsu over the little girl's forehead. He ambles over to them, taking the plates from the kids lap, setting them aside before bumping Orochimaru out of the way with his hip.

"Don't burn the eggs. Tsuyuko-chan how long has your head been hurting this time?" Orichimaru tells him rather pointedly and Jiraiya rolls his eyes, he knows how to cook. He half listens to the conversation his teammate has with his student.

"I dunno. Few days."

"I see. Jiraiya, when will Tsunade arrive?" Jiraiya starts to respond but stops when he sees Tsunade walking into the joint dining and kitchen.

"I'm here, what's wrong?" She eyes the kid on the counter who manages to smile and wave despite wincing as she does so. Orochimaru sighs.

"I need to schedule a neuro appointment for my apprentice." Jiraiya sees Tsunade's expression scrunch up into confusion from the corner of his vision. He preemptively scoots over.

"Move over." Orochimaru gets shoved to the side, he seems

completely unbothered by the gesture. If anything he looms over Tsunade's shoulder.

"You could say please hime, gotta show the kid good manners." He points the spatula at her, and gets rewarded with a pointed glare from Orochimaru.

"Tsuyuko-chan is a lost cause when it comes to those things."

"Manners are for people who have the time for pleasantries, shinobi do not have the time for that. Tsunade-san I'm pretty sure I have chronic migraines." The girl practically chirps. Tsunade runs her own diagnostic, and nods. Jiraiya turns the rice burner off and sets it aside to cool, he pulls the two eggs Orochimaru had cracked and then adds two more.

"I'll book you an appointment to run the test for sure. Orochimaru?" Tsunade queries, Jiraiya doesn't need to look up to know that Orochimaru won't have any outward reaction to the question.

"I agree with Tsuyuko-chan's hypothesis. Are you even hungry?" Orochimaru doesn't look away from her and he reaches behind to turn the burner for the miso down.

"Eh, not particularly?" Jiraiya turns off the burner and sets the eggs aside.

"She'd probably benefit from laying down for a bit. Can't find the cause of the headache but it's intense, I've cooled some of the inflammation in your vessels. You should have some relief in a bit. How often do you get these headaches?" Tsunade doesn't look pleased by that in the slightest. Jiraiya honestly feels bad for the kid.

"Often. I've had them since I was young. The first one I remember was around the time I turned two."

"Good to know, we will do a full work up when you come by neuro for an exam. Go rest kid." Tsunade near commands and the girl hesitates.

"Sensei?"

"Only fools argue with Tsunade Tsuyuko-chan. We will push training back until later." Jiraiya snorts, he plates their food. He'll set a plate aside for Tsuyuko for later.

“Okay sensei...” Jiraiya catches sight of her face when she looks down, and it does not look good.

“Is something wrong?” Orochimaru is already pushing Tsunade aside to get to his student.

“I don’t think I can walk.”

“Come here stubborn child.” Jiraiya is surprised when Orochimaru picks the girl off the counter and carries her out of the room.

“Tsunade pinch me, I think I’m dreaming.”

“Nah, that just happened. Orochi is just soft for that kid.” He pins the blonde with an utterly offended look. Why was it right now the first time he was hearing about this?

“When did that happen? How did he even get a student, I thought he told sensei he wasn’t going to be doing that.”

“She’s the kid he found in Hirofu” Tsunade whispers, and Jiraiya stops.

He remembers the night Orochimaru had left for Hirofu, with nothing but the noise of plague and death kept coming from the small village towards the sea, knowing he was walking to a graveyard. How shattered Orochimaru had looked when he returned. Jiraiya knew there was one survivor from the sickness that had plagued that port town.

He hadn’t realized they were a child.

“Oh shit.”

“Yea. By the way, where is your new brat?” He hands Tsunade her plate and carries Orochimaru’s over to the table for him.

“I have to pick him up this afternoon.”

“Bring him to the clinic for a health eval, I want to have a baseline for both kids so you two can have records to reference in the future.”

Jiraiya nods, he already had that on his agenda. Orochimaru rejoins them then, he looks utterly done with them both and they hadn’t done anything... yet.

“Was planning on it. Welcome back, kid okay?” He nods and sits, he pops the top of his eggs with his chopstick spilling yolk into rice.

“She will be fine after some rest. Stubborn child, apparently she’s been having this headache for a few days.” The way Orochimaru says this sounds like it is something of a recurring problem. Tsunade does not look happy, which meant he hadn’t told her this either.

“That’s concerning.” He interjects before Tsunade can start ranting.

“Yes, undoubtedly so.” Orochimaru takes a bite of his food.

“So you didn’t tell me you had your own student when I mentioned Minato.” Jiraiya pokes his chopsticks at Orochimaru who completely ignores him.

“Good job you didn’t burn the eggs. I saw no reason to. Tsuyuko-chan will have a different type of training than your apprentice will require. Tsunade, I think Tsuyuko would benefit from an introduction to iryo ninjutsu lessons with you.” He turns to Tsunade who levels him with an unimpressed look and says what they are both undoubtedly thinking.

“You could teach her that Orochimaru, I’m busy at the hospital.”

“I could, but considering your younger brother has no interest and will be on her team in say a year's time. I thought you would want someone around capable of making sure Nawaki’s self sacrificing attitude doesn’t get him into trouble.” Jiraiya coughs to hide a laugh, of course he had no trouble wagering Nawaki against Tsunade.

“Fine. You do realize though when you take Nawaki his friend is a package deal. You’ll have an actual team.” This warrants a long suffering sigh from their teammate, Orochimaru spends a moment examining the ceiling.

“I am aware.”

“So are you actually going to let her weaponize disease?” Jiraiya has to know, besides he cannot stand them sitting and eating in complete silence. They were well past that stage in their relationship. Tsunade drops her chopsticks.

“What?!”

“Of course not... At least not right now. Tsuyuko-chan has a plethora of interesting ideas, I’m curious as to where they will take her.”

Jiraiya thinks Orochimaru sounds and looks far too intrigued and pleased by that.

“Back up, you want me to teach iryo ninjutsu to someone who has those types of ideas?” Tsunade gapes and Orochimaru grins something almost sinister. Jiraiya is concerned..

And also unfortunately curious.

“Yes. Like I said, I think it would be beneficial for her.”

“I hate that I want to know what you mean by that.”

“Same Tsunade.”

“Curiosity always gets the best of us.” Orochimaru hums, he takes a sip from his coffee mug. Jiraiya and Tsunade share a look.

“Disgusting, put sugar or something in that.” Tsunade actually sounds offended. Orochimaru simply smirks.

“Black coffee is just fine, thank you.”

“Heathen.” Jiraiya goads.

“Perhaps.”

Minato isn't actually sure how he is meant to help his friend currently. He hadn't intended to hit her in the nose with his forehead and yet for some reason during their spar she got distracted so here they were. Tsuyuko pinches the bridge of her nose, scowling as blood starts to drip from both nostrils.

“Minato, why is your head so hard? Fuck that hurt.” She grumbles, he winces.

“Tsuyu.. I'm sorry.” Minato glances away, Orochimaru-san walking over to them slowly. One brow raised. Tsuyuko wasted no time to grab at her sensei's pant leg and tug as if to bring him down to their level. He must take pity because he crouches before them both.

“Orochimaru-sensei my nose is bleeding.” Tsuyuko whines with all the grace of an injured eight year old. Minato rubs his forehead, his

forehead protector took most of the brunt of it- but his ears were ringing and that's rather unpleasant to deal with.

“Yes I can see that. Minato-kun is your forehead alright?” He doesn’t flinch when Orochimaru’s hand lands on his forehead.

“Yea, Tsuyu’s face isn’t that hard. Is she going to be alright?” Minato thinks that is a concerning amount of blood dripping from her nose. Orochimaru glances back at her and sighs. He did that a lot around the coppered hair girl.

“In a moment I’m sure. Tsuyuko-chan I shouldn’t have to tell you how to handle your nose. Chin up child.” Orochimaru adjusts her head with one hand, so she’s sitting up right so the blood doesn’t drain down the back of her throat or something. Tsuyuko huffs.

“Yea, yea. Seriously Minato, what the fuck is your head made out of brick?” She grumbles, and Minato already feels bad.

“I don’t think so...” His head wasn’t made out of bricks.

“Language Tsuyuko-chan. Where did you even hear a word like that?” Orochimaru sounds so done with her. She shrugs.

“Hirofu was basically a port town, sailors have horrible mouths.” Tsuyuko mutters indignantly. Orochimaru sighs.

“Do not pick up those habits, child, it is uncalled for.” Minato finds himself nodding along. He didn’t really care for swearing.

“Jiraiya-san and Tsunade-san curse all the time.” Tsuyuko of course doesn’t seem to agree and tries to argue. Orochimaru pins her with a look, one that doesn’t seem to phase Tsuyuko in the slightest. Minato is honestly impressed. Orochimaru’s looks were fairly scary when he wanted them to be.

Jiraiya-sensei joins them then, depositing a cold press on Minato’s head and handing a rag to Orochimaru. Minato misses the smirk Orochimaru throws at Jiraiya-sensei as he scolds Tsuyuko.

“You are still my student first. Ignore Jiraiya, he is practically an idiot anyway.”

“Now that’s uncalled for. I grabbed some ice and a rag for the blood.”

“Good. Tsuyuko-chan come here, you are a mess child.” Tsuyuko

scoots over without argument and Orochimaru wipes her face.

“Sorry Tsuyu.”

“So’kay Minato-nii, my fault I was distracted.” Minato opens his mouth to ask what had distracted her, but she slams her jaw shut afterwards and he knows she’s not going to answer that question right now. He holds the cold press to his forehead.

Her nose still hurts hours later. The feeling churning in her gut is unpleasant and she is not happy in the slightest. Orochimaru-sensei must notice because after dinner he all but carries her to her room to go to bed and rest. Tsuyuko sits up on her futon, just as Orochimaru is about to turn the light off and leave the room. He stops in the doorway and turns his head to face her.

“What is the matter Tsuyuko-chan?” He sounds only slightly exasperated, and distantly she wonders if he realized her mood was so sour because of the interruption to their training session earlier in the day due to void masked ‘anbu’ agents.

She wanted to give him the benefit of a doubt... but..

But she can’t find the words to speak, or find the answer to his question. She doesn’t really know why she doesn’t want him to leave right now. Orochimaru sighs, he swivels fully stepping into the room, he doesn’t shut the door because Jiraiya and Minato are both out of the house for late night training of some kind so there is no one to worry about poking their head in unexpectedly. Tsuyuko digs her hand into the soft lavender and sage quilt, the same one he’d bought for her so she’d have something new and warm. She fights tears that she doesn’t understand why are even beginning to form.

“Tsuyuko?” He sits on the futon next to her hip, Orochimaru is gentle in a way she could have never imagined, he is kind.

She doesn’t want him to be bad. She desperately wants him to just be good. To be her sensei, who talks to her like she’s a person and not only a child. Her sensei who listens to her ideas with interest and is there for her when she can’t figure out how to explain her idea the right way that makes sense for this world. Tsuyuko buries her palms into her eyes to press her disobedient tears back in place. How dare they streak down her face like this.

Orochimaru pries her hands out of her eyes and wipes her tears with the sleeve of his off duty yukata top. "What is the matter child?"

"I.. I'm scared sensei." Tsuyuko sniffles, she knows she probably sounds pathetic.

"Whatever of child?" Orochimaru doesn't seem to fault her for it. Tsuyuko takes a moment to consider.

What exactly is she so afraid of? If Orochimaru had already turned.. If he were already bad. What would happen to her?

"I..I don't want to be alone." She croaks, Orochimaru shakes his head. Her curly bangs are pushed aside and he lets his hand sit on her crown.

"I'll only be gone for a few days, Tsunade will oversee your training, there is nothing to worry about." Everything about this exchange is sincere, he's not trying to trick her or ease her conscience. Bring her into any sense of false security, he's being genuine. Tsuyuko shakes her head.

"I'm not worried about training sensei. I already know everything Tsunade-shishou is teaching me currently." The last part more a throwaway than anything but of course he sensei picks up on it.

"Is that so?" She considers his question carefully.

Tsuyuko makes a choice, one that will either come back to bite her or benefit her. "Sensei... do you.. Do you think reincarnation is real?"

Orochimaru takes a moment to consider the question posed by his student. He considers everything he knows about the peculiar little girl, from their first meeting four years ago to the way she easily picks up information and how she understands the more complex aspects of his own work. Tsuyuko is an odd child, and there was always a part of him that felt as if she were less a child and more just a small person. While par for the course for shinobi children to be higher intellect both with general intelligence as well as emotional- the bounds Tsuyuko pushed were often passed that of what one expected of prodigies. Sure some of her more odd aspects could be accounted to the trauma she has already gone through from someone her age, Orochimaru does not often believe in simple solutions to complex problems.

Did he think reincarnation was real? There was nothing in science that suggested that as a possibility, however this was also a shinobi world founded with things that were passed the realm of scientifically possible as well as just straight logical.

“I don’t have any reason to not believe it could be real. Does that have anything to do with not needing basic medic lessons?” He raises a brow, Tsuyuko ducks her head and stares into her lap, the answer given. Orochimaru waits.

He thinks, in order for him to fully believe the possibility of reincarnation, he’s going to need to hear why she would even ask that in the first place.

“I think.. I used to be a doctor. I was working on my thesis and..” Here she falters, unsure, she glances between his face and her hands. Fists clench in quilted cloth.

“And?” He prompts because sometimes his student is stubborn and she needs prompting to fully complete her train of thought.

Tsuyuko takes a deep breath, clears her throat and then meets his gaze.

“This world was a story I used to read in my downtime... but you were a rogue nin, bad, which is stupid because you care so much.” With that admittance a few things click into place.

Reincarnation is possible.

The multiverse theory is something he needs to look more into.

His student has far more trauma than he originally suspected.

Of those three things only one takes precedent right now. He wipes near dried tears from Tsuyuko’s face.

“I see. There is no need to cry Tsuyuko-chan. I believe you, and I can promise you I am not evil.” As interesting as that sounded, he had no ideals of going rogue. No thoughts of evil ideations. Orochimaru likes his village, enough so that he has been injured a few times in service of the village. He respects his teammates, and if he were being honest with himself he considers Tsuyuka his child.

He’s not going to betray those things for anything.

Tsuyuko hiccups. It would be cute if he weren't concerned for her well being currently. He can see the signs of another one of her headaches settling in, he wonders if her reincarnation could have anything to do with her headaches as they currently had no explanation in the slightest to both his and Tsunade great annoyance.

"In the story you were on a quest for immortality and had a weird tattoo under your tongue." She continues, the need to make sure, to double check. Orochimaru does not like how distrust lingers in her expression, he does not like that look pointed at him in the slightest. The back of his throat burns at the other thing she mentions.

There was some merit to her memory then. Shimura had tried to brand him with that mark once upon a time. He clears his own throat.

"Ah... Immortality, while fascinating in theory, is not something I want to chase at the current time. I know about what 'tattoo' you speak of Tsuyuko-chan, I do not have it." To prove his point he shows her the bottom of his tongue.

But the distrust lingers.

"Then why are you going on a mission for the void mask agents, those aren't real ANBU." The accusation is loud and clear. Orochimaru sighs.

"I am well aware."

"Then why?" She whimpers, tears beginning to form again. It is then that Orochimaru realizes another key thing.

His student couldn't handle the idea of him betraying her trust. That's why she looks so hurt. The thought of him living up to the realities in whatever story she once knew was going to ruin everything.

"Because sometimes we do things that we don't want for the sake of civility and peace." He tells her, it's the truth. Because he doesn't enjoy working with SHimura, but in order to collect information on the old shinobi... well there were always going to be aspects of shinobi life they did not like or agree with.

"I don't like it." Orochimaru snorts at her petulant tone. Her answer to his statement doesn't surprise him in the slightest.

"Do you trust me Tsuyuko-chan?" He finds himself asking after a

moment. Tsuyuko blinks a few times as if it takes her a moment to process what he's asking. When she does she pins him with a horribly offended look.

"Of course I do Orochimaru-sensei."

"Then why do you worry?" He challenges. Tsuyuko grabs his hand, she traces old calluses and training scars.

"I don't want to lose you."

"You aren't going to lose me." He offers her small hand a gentle squeeze, he tries to reassure. Orochimaru knows it will not be enough for her. That she is going to want him to make promises that he might not be able to keep.

"Promise?"

"I cannot make that promise Tsuyuko-chan." And she knows that, the look on her face, the sonder and disappointment all morphed together. It's an odd look for an eight year old to wear, especially one who has not yet seen the battlefield.

"..I know, because we're shinobi." He nods, good girl, Tsuyuko is if anything a realist.

"We are. However I can assure you that Shimura will not be the cause of some foretold downfall, that idiot will be lucky if he lives past this war." He should probably not let these thoughts slip.

"Are you going to kill him?" She doesn't even hesitate to ask him this loaded question. Orochimaru finds the look of glee at the thought of Shimura dying on her face a tad concerning.

Now he needs to know what exactly the story she knew had said about his sensei's friend.

"That depends on him Tsuyuko-chan... Are you tired?" Tsuyuko shrugs.

"No. I'm too worried to be tired."

"Fair enough. Come here, we can continue this conversation in the

privacy of my room.” Tsuyuko crawls over to him, she allows her teacher to cradle her in his arms and pick her up and carry her from the room.

“Because Jiraiya-san sealed it?” Orochimaru is impressed by the observation.

“Exactly so. I would like to hear more about your time as a doctor, and the story you read.” She considers him for a moment, and lays her head on his shoulder.

“It’s a long story, and I don’t remember all the details.” He has seen her reactions to people, seen how she clings to Minato like she’s afraid to leave his side. How when she gets to see her school friends again she examines them for injuries they shouldn’t have been exposed to yet. Orochimaru had previously chalked it up to abandonment issues stemming from losing the people from her original home.

Now he has another theory.

“Yes, but by the way you react to certain people I’m willing to bet you’ve seen several of your friends die. Haven’t you?” Tsuyuko burrows her face into his collarbone.

“You cannot expunge the memory of death from your mind, it seers deep, leaving pits in your soul. Carcasses at your doorstep that there is nothing you can do but bury them with you. Death is terrible sensei, there is no satisfaction in dying.” Her words elicit a deep pain in his chest, to be so young and to know something so horrible with such certainty.

It’s an awful reality.

“No, I’d imagine there isn’t.” They have a long discussion ahead, but for now, he holds his child close.

Orochimaru isn’t going to allow the things she tells him to become their reality.

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Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading <3

# Truly a stubborn child...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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Tsuyuko barrels into Shikaku without a second guess, he must be somewhat prepared for it because the only response is a simple oof as she knocks into him. She ignores Inoichi who laughs and waves when Choza greets her with a kind hello. Their new sensei is quiet watching the whole exchange only talking to greet Tsunade who had the misfortune of being responsible for Tsuyuko while Orochimaru was away on mission.

*(A mission she was still not happy about, especially because it's not a standard ANBU mission. While she trusted who Orochimaru said he was.. Well it didn't mean she wanted to be doing potentially incriminating things.)*

"You're awfully clingy today." Shikaku draws but his arm around her shoulder doesn't budge and she has no intent to let go any time soon. Her friends becoming genin shouldn't scare her as much as it did, so many of the deaths she'd seen were years off from now.

*But you couldn't control where trauma manifested, you couldn't depict how one responded to fear.*

"I missed you. How's genin life?" Tsuyuko jabs her finger into Shikaku's bare cheek. He groans dramatically.

"Tedious." He grumbles, his jounin sensei scoffs. Tsuyuko kindly ignores the jounin in favor of reaching out to pull Inoichi into the hug. Her second favorite blond is not nearly as compliant as Minato and side steps to avoid being grabbed.

"I feel like that's a question we should ask you Tsuyuko, considering you've been at it longer and your sensei is a sannin." Choza pipes, and she shrugs. Genin life when your sensei aided in war efforts both on the field and in a lab was a different experience to being front ground fighters.

"I'm bored." She admits with a shrug, of course her timing is shit because Tsunade seems to have caught up with her. Her iryo ninjutsu

teacher looks majorly offended.

Tsuyuko struggles to care.

“Excuse you? How are you bored with the lessons you’ve had?” Tsunade pulls her up by the back of her shirt. Tsuyuko pouts at the medic, crossing her arms over her chest and huffing.

“I dunno know.” She does know, and she’s not explaining it to anyone else anytime soon.

“Tsuyuko has always been like that.” Choza pipes as Tsunade puts her back on the ground.

“Academics hold no new information to her. Or they’ve never seen to give her an issue.” Inoichi adds. Tsuyuko contemplates trying to hug him again.

“I like to read.”

“Eight year olds don’t like to read complex medical scrolls.” Inoichi counters because if anyone was going to argue with her pointlessly- it was him. Shikaku sighs at them both, before using her head as an armrest. There is a strong urge to lick him for the annoying gesture. It wasn’t her fault she was smaller than they were, it came with being younger than them.

“They do if they’re shinobi, or Tsuyuko.”

“Yup. Complex medical scrolls are fun to read.” Inoichi manages to somehow be offended by that statement he opens his mouth to retort, but is stopped by a hand clamping over his mouth and the cheerful face of his sensei intervening.

If Orochimaru-sensei ever put his hand over her mouth she would probably bite him.

“Orochimaru said you were a peculiar one. Tsuyuko correct?” Tsuyuko considers the jounin for a moment. He seems non ill-intentioned enough.

“Hai Hatake-san.”

“What gave it away?” Tsuyuko wonders if perhaps the man is actually an idiot, he was just as well known as her sensei. The look on Tsunade-shishou’s face seems to agree with her own line of thought.

“Minato told me these three took the exam and who their sensei was. You match the description that Jiraiya-san gave when I asked what you looked like. If you were anyone else I’d be concerned.” She informs him, pushing Shikaku off her shoulder and taking a step back to lean into Tsunade’s legs. The woman ruffles her hair much like her own sensei would, she leans into the gentle touch.

Tsuyuko really misses him, she hopes he’ll be back soon.

“Smart girl. We were just headed to lunch post morning training, if you two aren’t doing anything right now you are welcome to join us.” Hatake-san offers kindly, Inoichi does not look pleased by the idea in the slightest. Tsuyuko glances up at Tsunade.

“Tsunade-shishou?” Tsunade sighs.

“I guess.”

Orochimaru returns injured, with blood stained hands and a vendetta. All of which is ignored in favor of reassuring Tsuyuko that he is indeed fine. He thought she’d be asleep by now. But apparently that was not the case. Because instead he finds her standing in the mouth of the hall just as he is rounding the corner of the great room to go to his room to tend to the few scrapes he sustained during the mission.

Nothing in comparison to the lives that he had to take, but annoying enough to require emergency if albeit quick treatment.

“Sensei?” Tsuyuko has her lavender and sage quilt wrapped around her body, her eyes wide, tired, and terrified all at once. Orochimaru stoops to her level. The blood on his hands is well past the point of dry caked- so it will not rub off on her skin when he goes to brush a mess of curls out of her face so he can get a cleaner look at the expression his student is wearing.

“Why are you awake, Tsuyuko-chan? It’s well past three in the morning.”

“You’re two days late.” She whimpers, tears threatening to spill over. Orochimaru sighs, he isn’t sure why he expected a different answer.

“That happens from time to time, sometimes missions go amiss.”  
*Sometimes you have to kill your comrades.*

"I know.. But.." She trails off ducking her head down.

"You were worried."

"Yeah.." Tsuyuko mumbles dejectedly.

"Come here." She shuffles closer to him slowly, scanning his appearance as she goes. Tsuyuko stops, tentatively placing a hand on his stained shirt. Meeting his gaze with bleary eyes.

It's rather pitiful. His student never fails to be endearing, even if he is not currently pleased that she is even awake at this hour.

"But.. but you're hurt."

"Not badly, would it help you feel better if I let you help me patch myself up?" It will be good practice for her, and he doubts he will be able to convince the child to go to bed otherwise.

"Yes."

"Go get the med kit then." Tsuyuko scurries off, and Orochimaru carefully pries his jounin vest and knit pullover off. The wound carved into his abdomen could be worse, it could have been a lot worse truly. He starts unpacking the field rush job and barely glances up when the heavy extensive medical kit is placed on the small table.

"That looks gross sensei." She puts on child size gloves and pokes at the flesh around the cut. Orochimaru pins her with an amused look.

"I thought you were a doctor." Tsuyuko glances up from examining his stab wound to half scowl. Of course the effect is lost by the fact that it just makes her look like a pouty child.

"I am a doctor, sensei." She starts to disinfect the area, and this might be the first time he's seen her give this amount of care to her medical studies. Orochimaru was still very much counting this as training, because while she may have been a doctor in her last life, she is almost a decade out of practice in a practical sense.

"I see, well Tsuyuko-sensei, what is your prognosis?" She glares at him, the sarcasm does not go over her head it seems like it usually did Minato-kun.

"Some people shouldn't be allowed to have knives." She grumbles, applying a good amount of antibiotic ointment to the laceration.

“They really shouldn’t.”

His student is quiet for a moment while she continues her task. He is rather impressed with the level of care she is giving in order to treat the wound. Most shinobi, especially young ones, often rushed and missed steps. In turn making their recovery time worse in the process.

“Sensei.”

“Hnn?”

“I prefer when you call me Tsuyuko-chan.” He rolls his eyes, fighting a small smile.

“Very well Tsuyuko-chan. You are doing a good job at this.”

“Wound care was one of my favorite rotations.” She tells him when she grabs a bandage roll, and the medical tape.

“Why is that?”

“Because if wounds are treated improperly then it fucks a lot of things up. It’s one of those things that so many don’t pay enough attention to and it’s quite sad.” Orochimaru grimaces at her apparent need to be vulgar. When she was older it would be one thing, but currently as an eight year old she really needed to curb that terrible habit. Otherwise he is impressed with her line of reasoning.

“Language child. I agree, untreated wounds or poorly treated injuries can lead to serious problems. A rush job is fine at the moment in shinobi work, but the second you have time.” Tsuyuko bobs her head in agreement. He’s pleased that he will not have to fight her on this matter. She may be stubborn, but she was not stupid.

“Hai, hai sensei. It would not do anyone any good if you have to start treating serious infection on the battlefield. Staph infection is no laughing matter.” Orochimaru considers her response for a moment.

He asks a question that has been lingering on his mind for some time. Despite his own working hypothesis he is curious of her thoughts. “It is not. Tell me, is that how you knew what to do before I found you?”

“Hai, I recognized the signs early on. My guardian was some kind of healer, they saw it too. We tried our best to not get sick but...”



But no matter how hard you try, sometimes people still are hurt or die anyway.

“Life doesn’t always work out the way we intend.” He intones finishing her sentence for her. Tsuyuko nods.

“It does not. I miss them.”

“I would imagine so. They were your family at that point.” He knew that the people of Hirofu were not her biological parents. She was left there as an infant, and raised by a retired midwife. But blood relation did not equal who one considered family.

“Do you miss your parents Orochimaru-sensei?” Orochimaru takes a moment to ponder that particular question.

His parents died before he knew them in a way that lingered or even mattered.

“Sometimes, my memories of them are not abundant.” Tsuyuko pauses at his words.

“Oh.”

“That is the way of shinobi life. I hardly knew them.” He tells her, because the truth was it was what it was. How could he miss people he barely knew?

“That is very sad.”

“I suppose it could be. Thank you for patching me up, you did well.” She smiles brightly then, all thoughts of lost family seemingly gone.

“Thank you for trusting me, I’m glad you’re okay sensei.” Tsuyuko carefully packs the med kit up and sets it aside. She lingers, uncertainty clinging to her like a blanket.

Orochimaru grabs his student and sits her next to him on the futon. Tsuyuko thunks her head against his arm without missing a beat. He cleans his hands with the basin of water she brought and a warm rag, it takes time to pick dried blood out from under his nails. The chips in the nail varnish irritates him enough that he knows he’ll spend some part of tomorrow after filing his mission report reapplying varnish. He considers his student’s hands as she absently picks at her pajama pants, the bright yellow shinobi grade nail varnish has been picked at and

chipped. Obviously she has a bad habit of picking at her nails.

Stubborn child.

“I told you everything would be fine. Do I need to knock you out to get you to sleep, child?” Tsuyuko giggles, not at all threatened by his rather serious threat.

“Sounds enlightening.” She rubs at her face then, a yawn escaping as exhaustion must take hold, settling in like an old friend.

“Have you slept at all?” Of course she shrugs.

“Some. It’s hard to sleep when you have nightmares, sensei.” Orochimaru is both endeared and concerned. He makes the executive decision of allowing her to sleep in his bed, because he will not be settling down anytime soon. He moves her to the spot by the wall. Tsuyuko doesn’t hesitate to curl in on herself like a little cocooned ball.

Orochimaru grabs her quilt off the ground and drapes it over her.

“Go to sleep, child, I will protect you from them tonight.” In a matter of minutes her breathing slows to sleep and he grabs a scroll to start working on his post mission report.



Jiraiya needs to invest in a camera, because how else is anyone going to believe him when he says that Orochimaru is soft. The only problem currently is that his friend's entire lower abdomen is bandaged and he's carrying a sleeping child in his arms while also fighting with the beat to hell coffee pot. Which would be worlds easier if his teammate would put his sleeping apprentice down. But that doesn't seem to be the case.

"If you're injured, should you be carrying her?" He asks after another long moment of watching Orochimaru go through the steps of getting breakfast started. Seeming to grab enough for two people, which

means he was cooking even though he had no intention of eating right now. That coffee was about to be his breakfast.

Not the greatest of ideas.

“It’s just a scratch. Did she sleep at all while I was gone?” Orochimaru redirects. Jiraiya doesn’t even have to think about the answer. Because that kid did not sleep, to the point where it became concerning to Tsunade.

“Not really, Tsunade threatened to drug her.” Orochimaru doesn’t look surprised by that news in the slightest. He blows a wayward curl from the child’s unruly mane out of his face.

“Stubborn girl.” That was certainly one word for it, Jiraiya thinks. He grabs the eggs out of the refrigerator.

“She’s a pretty anxious kid, I’m surprised...” Orochimaru cuts him off with a dirty look.

“That she’s my student?” Jiraiya hears the accusation for what it is, a distrustful ugly thing. He shakes his head. That wasn’t it in the slightest.

“No. That she wanted to be a shinobi. A fool could tell she’s too smart for her own good, there’s no surprise as to why she’s your student.”

“Tsuyuko has always been a peculiar child.”

“You care a lot. More than I’ve ever seen before.” Orochimaru doesn’t have an immediate answer for that observation. Jiraiya takes the time to mince garlic and chop some spring onions.

“Like I said, she’s a peculiar child.” He glances over his shoulder, Orochimaru leaning against the counter, hair pulled back out of his face, a mane of curls sprouting from his neck as Tsuyuko-chan’s face is half hidden by her absurd amount of hair.

“She’s drooling on your shoulder. Orochimaru, did you drug your student?” He doesn’t think Orochimaru had been in any capacity last night, but... well he also wouldn’t put it past his friend.

“Don’t ask questions you don’t want the answer to Jiraiya.” Orochimaru draws dismissively, he takes a sip of his coffee.

“Alright then. Sensei invited us all over for dinner tonight.”

"I will be declining." Orochimaru informs him without missing a single beat.

"Figured, his direct council will be there."

"Disgusting." Orochimaru doesn't even try to hide his distaste of sensei's close council.

"Yeah... so your mission?" Orochimaru waves him off and sets his empty mug down.

"I have information for you, but later, it seems Minato-kun is awake." Jiraiya glanced behind him to find Minato walking into their kitchen rubbing at his still sleep riddled eyes.

"Morning sensei, Orochimaru-san."

"Good morning Minato-kun." Jiraiya thinks the small smile Orochimaru gives Minato is something of his imagination. Damn he really needs to invest in a camera. He turns his attention to his student.

"Hey kid, sleep okay? We have d-ranks today with Team Hatake."

"Is Tsuyuko joining us?" Jiraiya shakes his head at the question.

"Nah, I think she's going to be doing research while Orochi here recovers from his mission." Orochimaru nods a quick affirmation. Minato must notice Orochimaru's bandages because his expression morphs to one of concern.

"Are you alright, Orochimaru-san? Is she... asleep?"

"I am fine. Yes, so let's keep the volume down this morning." Minato nods and he ambles over to Jiraiya.

"No worries. Glad you are okay Orochimaru-san."

"Thank you Minato-kun. Jiraiya don't burn the eggs." Jiraiya pours the scrambled egg mix into the wok. He rolls his eyes.

"I know how to cook." (*Orochimaru doesn't miss his teammate mouthing fucker under his breath. He is ignored.*)

"Debatable. Minato-kun grab the plates, yes?"

"Sure. Do I need to get one for Tsuyuko?" Orochimaru refills his coffee

mug. Jiraiya gives him a dirty look for it.

“Just two kid, they aren’t joining us for breakfast.”

“I doubt she will wake up for food.” Minato considers his friend's prone form in Orochimaru’s arms. Orochimaru raises a brow in return.

“Umm.. is she drugged?” Jiraiya snorts as he plates the scrambled egg mix and rice.

“No, she was just awake until after four this morning.”

“Oh, I think she was worried about you.” Minato tells them as if they both weren aware of said fact. Jiraiya found it sweet in a bitter sort of way. Tsuyuko seemed to care about her teacher as much as Orochimaru did her. Like a child would their parent.

“Unfortunately that was the case.”

“It’s because she cares really big. When we were still in the orphanage she once told me that you were her hero. Cause you saved her, and you didn’t have too. She really looks up to you Orochimaru-san, I know you’re one of her important people.” Jiraiya often finds he enjoys the bluntness of children. The look on Orochimaru’s face is priceless.

“Ah..”

“Looks like you broke Orochimaru kid.” He sets Minato’s plate on the table, the blond seems more confused than anything else.

“I didn’t break him..”

“You rendered him speechless which is certainly a feat. Good job kid. Orochimaru, are you really only going to drink black coffee for breakfast...” Cause he’s going to tell Tsunade if that’s the case.

“Coffee then I’m going back to bed for a bit. I did only get in a few hours ago.”

“Do you want Tsunade to come by and heal you?”

“I’m fine, it is a small scratch, if Tsuyuko feels up to it later it can be practice.”

“Alright then. Mmkay Minato eat up, d-ranks aren’t going to do

themselves.” Minato groans and he grins at his student.

Orochimaru slips out of the kitchen once he finishes his second cup of coffee and carries Tsuyuko back to his room. She stirs when he sets her on the futon which he thought might have been the case because of how clinging she was when he tried to get up originally. He pins his student with a look. “Go back to sleep, I’m taking shower.”

“But wet bandages.” She grumbles through sleep riddle lungs not even bothering to open her eyes. Orochimaru snorts.

“Can be reapplied. I’ll let you help again, but I am going to shower. I refuse to be covered in my mission any longer.” because frankly he felt gross and he would be changing the sheets on the bed today.

“Be safe.” Tsuyuko chirps sleepily. Orochimaru rolls his eyes. Absolutely ridiculous child.

“Go back to bed Tsuyuko-chan or I will actually drug you..” She smiles sleepily at him before rolling over in the bed, effectively curling up in both her quilt and an extra knit blanket. He rolls his eyes, picks his soiled gear off the floor to put in the wash before heading to the bathroom on this side of the home.

Orochimaru spies his apprentice's own laundry in a basket, not enough for a load of its own so he makes the decision to wash her training gear with his own for now.

“Very domestic.” Orochimaru glares at Jiraiya as he leans against the laundry room's door frame. He ignores his stupid smug face.

“Shut it. I thought you were doing d-ranks.” Instead of bothering him.

“Minato is getting ready. Are you sure you don’t want Tsunade to come by? That looks nasty.” Jiraiya gestures to the slightly oozing gauze.

“The bandage just needs to be changed after I shower.” Orochimaru dismisses his concern, grabbing a fresh towel from the line closet just next to their wash room.

“Do you need us to wait around, I can help with that.” While the offer

is kind..

“No thank you. I can manage it.” He will be just fine.

“You sure?” Yes.

“Are you worried about me Jiraiya?” He teases, but the look on his teammate’s face makes him pause. Jiraiya crosses his arms over his chest and huffs.

“Unfortunately. You never let yourself get injured.”

“We are getting old.” It causes the toad sage to scoff.

“Orochimaru were barely twenty-four.” He was well aware of that fact and as it stood. Living past twenty was a miracle in this day and age.

“Old enough by shinobi standards.”

“Then what does that make sensei and his council?”

“Ancient. Liabilities. Easy to manipulate.” He offers easily, setting his towel on the bathroom counter as he goes. Grabbing a smaller med kit from behind the mirror.

“You know something.” He rolls his eyes at that statement.

“I know lots of things, Jiraiya.” Orochimaru turns the sink on to wash his face and brush his teeth before showering.

“Are you going to share with the class?” Jiraiya hands him a rag for his face. He sets it aside.

“Not yet. I need more information.”

“Anything I can help with?” Funnily enough he shrugs.

“Unless you want to help me dispose of Shimura, then perhaps not.” This is where Jiraiya stumbles, wincing at the mention of murdering their sensei’s supposedly closets friend.

“I know you don’t trust him.. Was your last mission that bad?” And he had good reason not to trust Shimura, frankly it could have been worse but it was still bad enough that he was highly annoyed at the moment.

“I learned why there were no other survivors in Hirofu.”



“Alright I’m not going to let you be a cryptic with that, what do you know?” Jiraiya instantly activates a privacy seal, Orochimaru can only sigh at the dramatics. He appreciates them nonetheless.

Especially considering what he learned.

“Weaponized disease Jiraiya, Shimura was testing something there. That’s why there were no other survivors.” He bunches the rag between his hands, it does nothing to quell the rage building in his bones taking root in his veins.

*People were not test subjects.*

“But Tsuyuko..” Jiraiya trails off. Because the truth was Orochimaru’s student was very lucky to be alive.

“I’m going to do blood work later, but I’m willing to wager she was simply immune to that strand of disease.” And if she wasn’t then she is now.

“Will you tell her?”

“Eventually. Now if that was all you needed, I haven’t showered in days and I dislike the feeling of my skin currently.” Jiraiya grimaces at that.

“...Okay. Have fun with that I guess.”

“Have fun with d-ranks Jiraiya.”

“Obviously it’s going to be great, oh, what did your kid do to the Yamanaka heir?”

“I haven’t a clue as to what you are talking about. Minato-kun will know, he seems the most informed of their entire age group workings.” Orochimaru’s answer borders on impatience not that his oaf of a teammate seems to notice or care.

“Why do you know that?” He glares at the question, what part of ‘needs to shower’ did Jiraiya not comprehend.

“Jiraiya.. I have to shower.” He hisses, trying to clearly make his point. Jiraiya is saved from getting shoved out of the bathroom by his own student.

“Jiraiya-sensei are you ready to go?” Minato calls from somewhere else in the home and Orochimaru sighs in relief when his teammate

finally walks away.

Finally he can wash the blood and grime from his body, to rid his flesh of the reminders of supposed comrades. He will not forget how they threatened his student. Their mistake truly, Tsuyuko is his to protect and he wouldn't let harm he could prevent befall his student. Orochimaru is careful to remove the hours old bandages as the shower heats up, it looks marginally better than it had earlier but he still utilizes a simple healing jutsu for the time being. Makes a mental note to check in with Tsunade about Tsuyuko's progress with her iryo ninjutsu and then debates taking her with him to the lab later today for test or waiting a few days more.

His hair takes longer than it should to fully wash, but once that is completed Orochimaru showers quickly. If he were going to relish under the spray of warm water he'd go to the bathhouse. But he gets the feeling the longer he takes the more likely his apprentice is to wake up and by the state of the circles under her eyes she needed to sleep much longer than she'd allow herself if he took too long. Truly she is a stubborn child.

His stubborn child.

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the chapter! Thank you for reading <3

~Vee

(the artwork is mine!)

# What goes up...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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Orochimaru stands next to his student in the middle of the training field, Tsuyuko is mumbling something that he can't quite make out from the sheer volume of words spilling out of her mouth. She is supposed to be on cool down following their morning training, doing light yoga, instead she is frantically writing in the dirt.

"Tsuyuko-chan?" He stoops to her level, she barely glances up at him.

"One sec!" Orochimaru side eyes his student, he considers being offended from being brushed off so abruptly. Instead he focuses on her scribbles in the dirt. Well then, that was certainly an idea.

"Tsuyuko-chan I could have given you a scroll." She waves off the reprimand and continues jotting down her idea all the while mumbling. Orochimaru reaches out, he places his hand over her stilling the next stroke of blade that will now have to be resharpened. Tsuyuko looks up through her eyelashes, half pouting, Orochimaru holds out his hand for the kunai.

This was not an idea that should be written in the dirt where anyone could see it.

"Needed something right then, kunai was already in hand." Tsuyuko tells him, tone rather petulant and he rolls his eyes. He commits her notes to memory before using a simple doton jutsu to wipe the ground clear.

"You will have to rewrite it." She pouts but nods. Orochimaru casually points out their watchers. Tsuyuko doesn't follow his signs but nods her head. He picks her up, they can continue to cool down at home.

"Yee, so'kay though. I think I figured out how to make smoke bombs double as depressants." She waits until they are out of the clearing to speak. He hums.

"And why ever would you do that?" He knows why he would want to do something like that and not say knock out gas.

“Because, sensei, what's better than an enemy that can't see to fight you? An enemy that now no longer wants to fight you.” She tells him matter of factly, he chuckles.

“Ah, and how child do you plan to go about that?” He turns onto the main road, stopping for a moment to decide if he wants to just shunshin them back to home or actually make the short walk. Tsuyuko pays his internal thoughts no mind and she pokes him in the cheek.

He may or may not try to bite her hand. Tsuyuko remains unphased either way. She continues a long winded explanation that is more her talking her idea out loud then actually talking to him despite being asked a question. Orochimaru lets her ramble. He takes a shortcut home that is deserted and low risk of running into anyone interested in listening in on their conversation.

Tsuyuko stops mid sentence and pulls at his sweaters folded collar. His brow instantly shoots up.

“Are you ready to tell me how you plan to make these bombs?”

“Do you have access to opium, wait no- thats super addictive.. Sensei, how hard is it to get a hold of a Valium?” She looks expectantly at him. Blinking innocently- he doesn't believe it for a single second.

“Not as hard as it probably should be since you sensei is a sannin and happens to be a researcher.” He remarks easily after a moment taking the last turn to their home.

“I don't appreciate the sarcasm sensei.” Orochimaru rolls his eyes, he crosses the threshold out the estates front gate. Protection and privacy seals stall to let them pass. He approaches the front door and slides it open with his free hand.

Slipping out of his shoes is more an issue with one hand so he results in barbaric practices by utilizing the front of his foot to pull the back. His apprentice somehow kicks her own shoes off with little effort and he doesn't know if he wants to be impressed by the genin or disgruntled that her shoes have ended up in two different places in the genken.

“Write your theory down in a scroll while I make lunch and we can discuss this idea. Should I be concerned that you know opium is highly addictive?” He's teasing her, he knows why she would know. Tsuyuko pins him with a look that reads as she thinks him to be quite

daft.

"I could give you a list of all the addictive drugs I know about. Oh I want to help make lunch, I'll remember the theory for later."

"Perhaps later... Fine, grab the cabbage from the refrigerator." He sets her down, Tsuyuko's face twists with disgust. Her expression is the epitome of betrayal and it is absolutely priceless. Orochimaru chuckles knowing exactly what is about to come out of her mouth.

"Disgusting." She grumbles while grabbing her wayward yellow sandals and placing them next to his. While he may not understand her disdain for cabbage he does frankly find it absolutely hilarious.

"I never said you had to eat it child."

"Good, cabbage is gross sensei."

"If you say so Tsuyuko-chan."

"I do." She huffs, but skips into the kitchen and straight to the refrigerator to do what was asked of her.

Conveniently Jiraiya and Minato come in right as lunch is being pulled off the stove. Tsuyuko waves happily at them from her perch on the countertop. Orochimaru sighs at his apprentice, he reaches over her head to grab the plates and to hand her the two egg rolls he made for her that were cabbage free.

"Sensei made egg rolls." Minato blinks slowly at how happy she sounds by this and Orochimaru can see the cogs turn in his head and without missing a beat he retorts.

"You hate cabbage." Tsuyuko nods along with that brilliant deduction from her friend. Jiraiya looks quite perplexed by the entire exchange and if perhaps mildly offended. Orochimaru plucks Tsuyuko off the counter and sets her on the ground, nudging her with his bare foot for her to go to the table.

They already spend far too much of their lives eating not around the table for him to want to stand around the kitchen.

"He made mine without cabbage." Tsuyuko tells Minato sitting down

next to him. Orochimaru sets a plate in front of Jiraiya's student and then motions for his teammate to fix his own plate before him.

"Why do you hate cabbage Tsuyuko-chan?" Jiraiya asks once his plate is secured and he's settled at the table on Minato's other side. Tsuyuko scrunches her nose up at him, Orochimaru sits down on her other side and next to Jiraiya.

"Bad texture no matter how it's cooked and it smells funny." She informs them plainly. Orochimaru who has already heard this rolls his eyes. He thinks she's probably never had properly prepared cabbage before but he also isn't going to force her to eat it.

Stubborn child would just starve and it was much easier to just not bother with it. He could make alternative when the rest of the had cabbage, the extra steps worth it if it meant his kid would actually eat. Orochimaru remembers being younger, remembers how his own palette had changed since childhood, and knows that some things are just better to let run their natural course.

Tsuyuko generally liked most foods, the few aversions she had to things like cabbage and the way Jiraiya makes eggs were not going to stunt her growth.

"Block the senses to your nose then kid." Jiraiya challenges, and she deadpans at him.

"Not being able to smell it isn't going to change the fact that the texture is all wrong Jiraiya-san." Jiraiya sighs, deciding that he wasn't going to win the argument with Orochimaru's kid.

Good call.

Orochimaru takes a sip from his coffee. Setting it on the wrong side so Tsuyuko won't be tempted to drink it. She could have coffee later in life, but he would not be adding caffeine to the mixture that was his student. As if she can read his mind the eight year old is suddenly pouting at him full force, she is ignored.

"Alright then, how was your training?"

"It was good. Minato I think I figured out how to make those smoke bombs."

"The depression ones?" Minato confirms and Tsuyuko nods happily. Orochimaru gets the feeling that the child is not going to be good at

naming the things he invents.

“Un hun. Had an epiphany, I think it will be cool. How was your morning training?” Of course she does not go into detail about said epiphany but Minato seems unbothered. Their conversation continues easily. Orochimaru eats an eggroll in one go, Jiraiya levels him with an unimpressed look that is frankly ignored.

“Sweet, I can’t wait to see what you came up with! And good, I met Uzumaki-sama today.” Minato tells her and Tsuyuko tilts her head and Orochimaru can see the string of thoughts that circulate as she considers that information.

“Did you tell her about your idea for using the Nidaime’s thing?” Orochimaru stares at her for a short moment, she looks over at him, he raises a brow. Completely unimpressed with her vocabulary choice at that moment.

“Thing? Tsuyuko-chan.” She shrugs, and by the gleeful look on her face he’s going to be even less impressed with what she says next.

“Time space bullshit?” Jiraiya snorts, and Orochimaru glances behind him to pin the toad with a dark look.

Children using such language was not funny. It could make people think rather badly of his apprentice and he did not want that for her. Not when she already had the ramifications of having him as her sensei. He shakes his head at the child.

“No, Tsuyuko-chan-” she pouts, but then smiles completely unphased. “-Minato-kun you want to learn about the hiraishin?”

Because this was the first he was hearing about that and it was rather fascinating.

“I do. The Nidaime’s fuinjutsu theories have always been really interesting to me.” Given what Orochimaru knew about Minato’s family prior to the child becoming an orphan, that tracked. But for clarity’s sake.

“Your grandfather had been one of his friends, correct?” Minato confirms, eyeing Tsuyuko carefully as she starts reaching across the table to grab Orochimaru’s coffee. Orochimaru waits until her hand is just touching the handle and then he grabs her tiny hand stopping her.

She smiles unapologetically at him. Orochimaru grabs his cup and holds it away from her. Minato answers his question.

“Yeah, when the Nidaime died he left a bunch of his notes to my grandfather and they got passed down to me when my parents died during the start of the second war.”

“Minato-nii’s grandpa was in love with Tobirama-sama. They exchanged love letters.” Tsuyuko doesn’t miss a beat to inform them of this information.

Information that they both were well aware of mind you. Jiraiya stops mid bite to stare at her. “Tsuyuko-chan, what in the world?”

“I read them.” That was certainly an invasion of privacy, not that such things usually mattered to shinobi but Minato is her friend so she should know better.

“I let her.” Minato tacks on helpfully. Yes that would make more sense then.

“More importantly, why do neither of you look surprised?” Tsuyuko pulls her hand out of his to point dramatically at them both. Orochimaru narrows his eyes.

Whatever is this mood? She was more high energy than normal. Something is off. Wrong.

“Hiruzen-sensei told stories.” He tells her quickly. Tsuyuko blinks, and Orochimaru knows the subject is going to divert once more.

What is going on with his apprentice?

“Oh, boring. Anyway, Minato, you never answered my question.”

“Sorry, you kinda derailed the conversation though Tsuyu.” Minato informs her plainly and Tsuyko waves him off. That hardly mattered.

“Schematics, did you tell the Uzumaki obaa-sama about your interest or not?”

“Kushina-san had apparently told her before.” Minato answers after he takes a sip from his water. Tsuyuko nods.

“That is not surprising, is she still loud?”



“Yea, she did tell me to say hello to you though.” Tsuyuko nearly feels bad for her aversion to the other girl, but she was just so boisterous and loud that it often gave her a horrible migraine. When the other girl could learn to control her speaking volume then they could interact more.

“That’s nice, but if she’s still loud I can’t.” Minato nods, he knows. He knows that it’s not personal, that she doesn’t dislike Kushina. She just can’t be around her and be comfortable.

“Does the Uzumaki girl make your headaches worse?” Sensei queries and she nods.

“A bit unfortunately, everything about her is so bright and loud.”

“That’s just how the Uzumaki are kid.” Jiraiya tells her, and before she can halt the reactions she scowls at him.

“No, that’s just what they wanted you to believe.”

“Um..” It must catch him off guard but currently she pays him no mind.

Tsuyuko thinks about all her time spent in the Konoha public library and its poor organizational skills. She remembers the numerous amounts of information she’s consumed there on varying topics because nothing is where it should be. One scroll in particular peaking through the pool of knowledge. The scowl on her face deepens.

She’s not thinking clearly now, everything she’d read...

“I found an old scroll in the library when I was researching smoke bombs, it was someones journal I think it was placed in the wrong section. It was very informative, so I gave it to sensei afterwards.”

There was no justice to any of it.

“I will pass it your way when I am finished reading it.” Sensei’s voice in a small muffle in her ear as she continues to spiral in emotions she doesn’t understand.

“Thanks, but I’ve probably read it. Tsuyuko-chan you can’t go around telling people that.” Jiraiya too is muffled but his words ring loud and clear.

She does not approve of a call for silence.

How was that fair to the people of Uzushiogakure? *How was it fair to the people from her home village?!*

*People who died for no good reason at all. Lives that had so much potential to be happy.*

“What?!-” She snaps without paying any mind to the three people sitting with her, Tsuyuko barrels on through, her anger and sorrow slowly eating away at her. “-That the Uzumaki knew they were going to be attacked and subsequently die. That they did it because of the rest of the world's fear and they wanted to avoid another full fledged war of nations. I don't think that's a secret that's fair to keep, especially since we ended up going to war again anyway and there will be more in the future. Those innocent people deserved better, who are we to judge who gets to live or die that's wrong. There is no justification in what happened to them. ”

“Tsuyuko-chan!” Orochimaru calls out sharp and suddenly, a warning all to itself. Tsuyuko drops her chopsticks. Her head is ringing, fucking hell, now was not the time for this. Jiraiya and Minato both look something stricken to horror and she honestly doesn't know why.

Something warm and wet trickles over her lips. Oh, that must be why.

“My nose is bleeding.” She mutters numbly, before she can bring her hand up to stanch the bleeding Orochimaru is plucking her up out of her chair in a swift movement. Tsuyuko finds herself sitting on the counter with a rag held to her nose. Sensei's face has a hard to read expression, she blinks slowly at him.

A strong wave of sorrow washes over her, along with a mountain of guilt. Her lower lip wobbles and the back of her throat starts to burn. There are tears in the corner of her eyes before she can even stop them and suddenly she's full blown crying again.

The fall of Uzushiogakure shouldn't get to her this much, it wasn't like she had any ties to the island but her heart breaks for the people who had lived there. It had only been a few months since Kiri bested the tiny island nation. So many people were just gone, missing, and dead. It was an absolute tragedy. And while Tsuyuko couldn't handle being around Uzumaki Kushina in the slightest due to how the other child set off her headaches for her sheer volume - this wasn't something she would wish upon even her worst enemy.

No one deserved to experience the loss of their home and people.

She missed Hirofu, and the simplicities before.

Before senseless death, death for the sake of murder and power.

“Tsuyuko-chan.” This time sensei is soft, he wipes her tears with his sleeve. She looks up at him through blurry vision and tear filled eyes.

“I.. can’t.. I don’t want to watch.. I don’t want to feel like this anymore.” Tsuyuko knows she isn’t making sense, not good sense at least. She hopes Orochimaru can figure it out regardless. Because she can’t watch the people she loves die. She won’t.

They don’t deserve to die.

“You haven’t been sleeping again, stubborn child.” He mutters, removing the rag from her nose to check the bleeding. Her head is still ringing, but she focuses on his eyes instead.

He was always more expressive there than most realized. His eyes were very telling and right now the warning bell is loud and clear. Orochimaru is concerned. Tsuyuko blinks, not quite clearing her tears or even stopping crying all together. Her sensei wipes dried blood off her chin.

“Sensei.”

“What is it child?”

“Was Uzushio doing his thing?” She whispers, digging her nails into her thighs to reroute all the pain receptors in her head and even out the ringing. Orochimaru’s hand stills, he sets the rag down, taking her hands in his stopping her self-harm.

“No more of that Tsuyuko.” He doesn’t answer her question, not now while they still have an audience. Tsuyuko is suddenly vividly aware of the scene she’d just caused, horror washes over her.

There are certainly perks to being reincarnated with one's past lives memories, there are also downsides in that her body is a child and her emotional capacity does not match. As one could imagine, that could cause some horrendous backlash. Emotions too big for the body to handle and process all on its own. She is still a child after-all. Tsuyuko can feel tears building back up, the tightness in her throat returns and suddenly she has the very real desire to simply disappear.

So she does.

## Chapter End Notes

So it wasn't explicitly stated, but it has been some time since the last chapter to the start of this one

I hope you enjoyed!

I appreciate all the kind comments on the last few chapters, i hope to be able to respond to them soon <3

Thank you for reading!

<3

Oh and if you want snippets and stuff for upcoming chapter or whatever I have a discord, and as long as you're 18 plus I'd love for you to join and hang out <3

[Naruto Fics Discord!](#)

# The answers are wrong...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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He hasn't taught her the body flicker jutsu yet and somehow his student has just flickered out of his sight. Orochimaru stares for a half second at the empty spot on the counter, perplexed by what he just witnessed. Jiraiya looks absolutely startled like he's seen a ghost.

"Jiraiya?" But he is waved off, Orochimaru fights to quell the irritation that arises from that single notion. The desire to perhaps reap bodily harm to the other man. His student is missing, and his teammate is keeping pertinent information from him. Orochimaru will not apologize for the anger that rises up the back of his throat.

"Minato, where's Tsuyuko-chan's favorite place to go?" Jiraiya turns to his student. Minato is already standing from the table, lunch forgotten.

"She doesn't go places, when Tsuyu is upset she seeks out certain people."

"Who?" Orochimaru doesn't snap, but he's not quite as patient as he would be with the children. Minato doesn't seem to notice or he doesn't mind because the boy just answers.

"Well before now it was Shikaku and Inoichi." The implication of this statement is not lost on the sannin, Tsuyuko considers them to be her safe place. A sensation of guilt or something close crawls up his spine and Orochimaru stomps it down.

He cannot afford to feel sorry for things that he isn't sure as to why they happened to begin with.

"I thought she hated him." Jiraiya sounds perplexed, Orochimaru thinks that if hatred is the vibe his teammate got then he clearly didn't understand complex friendships and considering their own. He'll find time to be unimpressed later.

"Ah, no, their friendship is weird. They both care a lot but in different ways. So they just butt heads often." Minato mutters, and that

certainly sounded far more accurate than simple hatred.

Hatred was such a strong emotion, and it was something that of all the nuanced concepts that Tsuyuko knew she understood better than other non-scientific realities.

“It’s midday, those two should still be running d-ranks with their genin team.” Jiraiya informs them, and Orochimaru doesn’t question why his teammate is familiar with Hatake’s team schedule. Not when it will help him get to his student quicker, to make sure she is alright and to figure out what exactly just happened. Jiraiya turns to Minato, and commands him to stay here in case Tsuyuko comes back.

Orochimaru grabs his shoes. He will process the weird string of emotions he feels currently once he knows his student is safe.

What in the world was that?

“I haven’t taught her the body flicker technique yet.” He tells Jiraiya once they are on the roof, Jiraiya doesn’t look at him as he expands his senses to locate Hatake. Or so Orochimaru assumes that’s what his teammate is doing.

“Yea, that wasn’t a body flicker. At least it didn’t look like the traditional one.” Jiraiya mutters, turning sharply to focus in one specific direction.

“Excuse me?” But now that Orochimaru takes a moment to think. As gross as it feels to think, Jiraiya was perhaps right. That hadn’t presented like a true body flicker. He raises his brow, demanding an explanation. Jiraiya’s hand lands on his shoulder and Orochimaru knows he will not be getting one anytime soon.

“Found her, I’ll explain later.”

“I will hold you to that.”

“I know.”

Shikaku sits up sharply, one of Sakumo-sensei’s hounds summons ears twitch next to him. Sensei was still running a few more training exercises with Inoichi and Choza- so it was just him. The genin doesn’t hesitate to fully stand. If something bad were to happen he has

sensei's summons with him. He is not expecting to find Tsuyuko curled in on herself sitting at the base of a tree, tears streaking down her face.

He crouches to her level and cloudy warning eyes open staring blankly at him. Her pupils are blown wide and she looks a bit like she's been through a wind storm. Shikaku cautiously reaches out to brush her wild bangs from her face, she may be younger than him but he knows she's still a genin- one training under a sannin. She could very well attack him and hurt him if he wasn't careful.

"Tsuyuko." She blinked owlishly, once then twice, then three times more. Shikaku dusts a tear off her cheek with his thumb.

"Shikaku?" Tsuyuko carefully places her hand over his, tracing old training scars with tentative soft strokes. An old familiar thing from afterschool when she'd hide with him, head buried in his lap as headaches became too much to deal with.

He's glad that they seemed to have gotten more manageable for his friends since her early graduation. Even if he missed those moments that were just theirs. Two children looking for solace and comfort during these hard times. Of all their friends, when his world was falling apart as a result of his siblings dying on battlefields that weren't their creation- Tsuyuko was the one who held the sky in her hands so the weight of grief wouldn't crush him.

Shikaku brushes another stray tear from her cheek.

"Yea. You've been crying. Did Minato say something stupid again?" Minato, for a genius, for being the only one in their group Tsuyuko considered her family and not just a friend, often set the younger girl off without meaning to.

She hesitates, looking away and chewing at her lip. Shikaku lets her gather her thoughts, he counts the freckles on her face, mentally tracing them like one would constellations in the sky. Sakumo-sensei's summon is quiet by his side, alert, Shikaku hopes sensei won't be too mad at him for wandering off.

"No.. it was me." She admits, a whisper in the dirt, an undeniable guilt to her tone. Shikaku raises his brow, a challenge. He nearly scoffs.

"I find that hard to believe."

"I'm capable of being stupid from time to time." Tsuyuko glares, it holds no ill will and he shrugs. He didn't say she wasn't capable of it, he just found it hard to believe.

"Sure. Where are your shoes?" Because if she ran out here without her shoes then that was stupid and would prove her point more than just her telling him she was benign a type of way. This was a trapped training forest. He doubts she ran though, at least not the whole way. Has she learned shunshin yet? Tsuyuko chews at her lip.

"At home. I.. I don't know.. I was upset, and I just wanted to disappear. And then I guess I did? I don't.. I don't know how I got here." He blinks, okay, well then.

"Hmm. Maybe you are capable of making mistakes then. Your sensei is probably worried." Tsuyuko looks like she wants to argue with him over whether Orochimaru-san is worried about her or not. Shikaku is frankly not impressed with her in the slightest.

"I was a brat." He snorts. That wasn't surprising.

"You usually are. Come here, you can't stay here, this area is trapped." And he doesn't want to explain to sensei if something happens. Tsuyuko manages a smile, and soft laugh.

"Yea.. I nicked my ankle earlier." She gestures to her foot and he sighs at the semi dried blood and small cut.

"Sakumo-sensei will wrap it for you. Loop your arms around my neck. I'll carry you." Tsuyuko grabs onto his chainmell through his shirt, he hooks his arm under her knee and back. Tsuyuko smiles at him when he stands up.

"Thanks Shikaku."

"No problem." He carries out back the way he came, the wolfhound next to him makes sure they don't encounter any traps. Tsuyuko is quiet.

"Wanna tell me what you were being a brat about?" Shikaku asks after a moment.

"No..." Tsuyuko looks away, and he can't tell if she's mad or embarrassed by whatever has happened.



Which with her, either could be feasible depending on the root cause. Whatever that may be.

Shikaku hums, he knows better than to try to make her talk, unlike Inoichi.

“That’s fine. Ino will probably make you talk though.” Tsuyuko scoffs.

“He can eat dirt.” She grins something feral, Shikaku rolls his eyes. To think he has to put up with both of them for the rest of however long they all live. It’s going to be a nuisance.

“You two are ridiculous.”

“Shikaku-kun, Sakumo-sama is looking for us.” The hound turns to take both their appearances in, there is flicker across her eyes and Shikaku realizes sensei must be seeing what the hound sees. Tsuyuko blinks rapidly, and Shikaku wonders if she’d even realized the summons was with him. Or if the fact that Ai-san talks.

“We’re almost back to the clearing. Is he mad?” Shikaku questions, he didn’t think that Sakumo-sensei would be mad.

For the most part sensei didn’t seem to get mad or upset, at least not where they could see it. The jounin was jovial and all around a happy guy. Shikaku knows he’s on some mission leave right now as a result of his partner having their first kid, but he hadn’t actually met either of them. Sensei was private about that part of his life, and really it made sense. Ai-san shakes their head.

“No, he seems confused and worried. Two of the sannin are with him.” With that Tsuyuko tries to shrink in his arms, and for someone as small as she was even with the small age gap between them the fact that she can make herself even smaller is impressive.

“Sensei?” She hesitates. Which confuses Shikaku a great deal, that didn’t make sense.

They all knew how much Tsuyuko respected and honestly loved Orochimaru-san, the sannin was basically doubling as a parent to her. Even without the standard notion of jounin becoming orphaned genin’s legal representation until they reached sixteen. This reaction speaks volumes though, and it concerns Shikaku to no end.

What had happened to make her think her sensei would want to see her?

"The snake one is there. He is, unusual, hard to read. Not mad. Conflicted." Ai-san informs them. Tsuyuko doesn't unshrink herself.

"Sounds like sensei." She mutters.

"Let's get you back to him."

"He's probably mad at me." Shikaku tries not to snort, really he does, but the thing is- from the few interactions he's seen of Tsuyuko and Orochimaru-san it is obvious that their relationship goes beyond the standard jounin sensei and genin one.

"Doubtful. He's probably just worried. If you were confused by whatever you did, then imagine how he feels having to watch."

"Oh."

Shikaku shakes his head, for an actual prodigy Tsuyuko is frankly dense. Anyone with eyes could see how much she meant to the sannin. He pushes past the last bit of under bush and is back in the clearing. Sakumo-sensei is talking quietly with Orochimaru-san and Jiriaya-san. Inoichi and Choza are both in the process of cool down stretches which means sensei will probably call their day soon. Tsuyuko takes one look at her sensei's face and immediately buries her face in his shoulder, Shikaku can only roll his eyes at her. Utterly ridiculous.

Orochimaru-san approaches slowly, and then he's crouching down so he's at their level. Tsuyuko barely glances up, the snake sannin sighs. "Tsuyuko, look at me, please."

That startles them both, Tsuyuko so much that she whips her head up and around to stare. Shikaku almost drops her from how quickly she flails.

"Sensei?"

"Who else would I be stubborn child?" He challenges with a raised brow and what may be considered a hint of a smirk.

"You never say please. Obviously you have to be an imposter." Tsuyuko counters without missing a beat. Shikaku imagines that being her sensei is probably exhausting.

If anyone was up to the task it was most certainly the sannin.

Orochimaru-san doesn't roll his eyes like most would at her impossibly childish tone. He sighs, and that seems to be confirmation enough for Tsuyuko that he isn't an imposter as she unfurls a bit.

"I don't. Not usually. Frankly I am concerned. I knew it would get your attention."

"I'm sorry."

"I know you are. Come here, you are getting blood everywhere." Tsuyuko doesn't hesitate here, she reaches for her sensei and that's a good sign. So whatever happened hadn't affected how much she trusted him to take care of her then. To keep her safe.

"I stepped on some ninja wire."

"Of course you did." The sannin grumbles in no shape or form impressed with his student. Tsuyuko grins unrepentantly at him. Shikaku walks away, knowing he's not going to get an explanation for whatever is happening right now.

He ambles over to Sakumo-sensei and Jiraiya-san. Sakumo-sensei reaches out and ruffles his hair. "Next time get me if you hear something, but good work."

"Yea, yea. Will do. Are we done for today?" Shikaku grumbles, crossing his arms over his chest. Sakumo-sense merely grins.

"You kids worked hard today, so we can call it."

"Alright. See you tomorrow, sensei." Sensei's hand on his head stills, the jounin frowns.

"Ah, no training tomorrow I have an assignment." Shikaku takes the explanation for what it is and nods.

"Good luck then."

"Thanks kid."

Tsuyuko waits for Shikaku to walk away before she talks again. No need to burden him with this conversation. Orochimaru-sensei waits patiently for her to gather her thoughts as he silently works on

wrapping her injured foot. She doesn't quite remember tripping on ninja wire if she were being honest, but she recognized the look of the injury to know what caused it.

She had no idea what happened. Doesn't even begin to have answers for the millions of questions sensei probably has. Or even her own.

Eventually she does gather the courage to ask one.

"Am I in trouble?" Sensei doesn't stop his task, he barely glances up when he counters.

"I don't know, should you be?" Tsuyuko finds herself frowning. Confliction eating at her. Why isn't he mad? She yelled, she almost revealed the big secret to Jiraiya and Minato, her emotions got the best of her. The latter of which Orochimaru-sensei was constantly reminding her she needed to get control over. To own her emotions so they didn't consume her in turn.

"I yelled." She points out after a moment. Orochimaru finishes wrapping her foot before he responds. The time that takes, the moments from her comment to his answer continue to eat like a festering wound.

"You were very upset." From the way he responds, Tsuyuko gets the feeling that sensei might find that a reasonable course of action.

"A little." She doesn't bother to stand just yet, head ducking down to not have to meet sensei's unwavering gaze. He must consider her for some time because he is oddly quiet.

Sensei reaches out, fingers under chin, tilting her head back up to look at him. Tsuyuko debates closing her eyes to not have to deal with his sharp calculating look. But there is an undeniable amount of concern that lingers in snake eyes that she can't look away, can't will herself to unsee.

Orochimaru-sensei is worried. Tsuyuko realizes after a moment, Shikaku had been right. Sensei is worried and she worried him. *She worried him.*

He removes his finger from under her chin after a second, perhaps making sure she won't look away again. Finally he sighs.

“You disappeared.” Orochimaru starts, because he cannot wait any longer to get to the problem at hand. She disappeared with no real cause and he could not let this become a habit. Something like this could become dangerous fast. His intrigue over the how is not quite as pertinent as her safety overall, if they didn’t get to the bottom of this soon and she did this once he started taking her on missions it was going to be a major issue.

Tsuyuko doesn’t answer immediately, and well he isn’t exactly expecting her to. She kicks her feet absentmindedly.

“Yeah... Um I don’t know how I did that.”

“Of course not.”

Orochimaru plucks her off the stump. Tsuyuko winds her arms around his neck without hesitating. Pressing her cheek into the side of his face. He has to blow a few pieces of her wild curls from his own field of vision. When her hair proves to be just as stubborn as she is, he pulls his own ponytail down. His hair, while yes long, was not going to obstruct his walking vision. She takes the ponytail from him and pulls all her hair up into a downright mess of a bun- it will do for now.

Afterwards she resumes her hold and cheek presses into the side of his face. Orochimaru walks slowly, their conversation far from over but since neither she nor himself knew how this all happened but Jiriaya and perhaps Sakumo seemed to have some inkling of an idea...

Orochimaru wants answers.

“Sensei?” Tsuyuko pokes his cheek. Orochimaru contemplates biting her finger.

“Hmmm?”

“You never answered my question.” Orochimaru doesn’t stop walking as she mumbles this all sorts of dejected. He remembers files, upon files, upon scrolls of information he stumbled upon doing long night research binges prior to the destruction of Uzu. Contemplates everything he knows about ROOT, about Shimura Danzo, both from being Hiruzen-sensei’s student and his own attempted recruitment into the deep shadows when he had been younger.

Shimura wanted him for his research, and well frankly Orochimaru found himself only interested in obtaining his own whims- he would not allow himself to become enticed by frivolous desires of things like immortality. There were other ways to study and learn all of the jutsu he desired. He has no idea what cosmic discourse made him slightly off track from that of the one in his students story, but he finds will not concern himself with that answer either. It's not a question worth being asked.

Tsuyuko pulls at his hair when he takes longer to answer than she must deem appropriate. He sighs.

"I think you know the answer Tsuyuko-chan."

"I don't like the answer sensei." She pouts, and he's tempted to roll his eyes. Instead he nods.

"No, it seems not. Want to tell me what all of that was?" Tsuyuko wrinkles her nose with the questions, brows furrowing together.

"I was angry." She admits carefully, owning her emotions, but also acting if she was perhaps appalled by them. It was a perilous balance, between owning one's emotions and also not feeling guilt over them.

Something to add to their lessons.

"That much was rather obvious, child." He doesn't quite tease, but he manages his tone so it's not so patronizing. Orochimaru didn't think it would get them anywhere for him to scold her right now.

"It's.. it's just not fair sensei." She huffs, annoyance creeping into her tone, brimming into righteous anger. Orochimaru sighs.

There were no parts of shinobi life that were any shades of fair. There was no justice in their lifestyle. No way to barter with death, or make deals with devils. In the end neither was worth the toll they'd reap for such arrangements.

"Shinobi life hardly is, Tsuyuko-chan." She bites her lip, hard enough to draw blood, and he will have to talk to her about these self-destructive habits.

"I hate it." There is venom on her tongue that is undeniably potent. Of all the things she would truly hate, injustice does not surprise him in the slightest.

“Hatred is a strong emotion, kid.” Sakumo injects as he and Jiraiya approach. Tsuyuko redirects her attention to the jounin. It takes half a second for the heat to clear from her eyes and then she’s offering a genuine apology.

“Sorry for interrupting your team time again Hatake-san.” Sakumo chuckles, he waves the apology off with a kind grin.

“We were done anyway. Say kid, do you know how you teleported here to begin with?” Orochimaru does not like the tone this is asked with, the accusation laying in wait like a wolf ready to pounce. Tsuyuko shakes her head no, furrowed brows and frown replacing her previous expression.

“I already told sensei no, Hatake-san.” Sakumo sighs at that, he turns to Orochimaru and the sannin doesn’t hesitate to raise a brow in return.

“Fair enough. Orochimaru, if it happens again, come find me, I may have an idea.” He narrows his eyes, surely Sakumo didn’t think he would just let this go that easily. If he had answers, Orochimaru wanted them.

“Or you could tell me now Sakumo.” It’s not quite a demand, but it’s close and he hopes the other jounin gets the memo that keeping information in regards to his student could prove detrimental to one's health.

If she gets hurt because of secrets..

It’s the Hatake clan head’s turn to offer a maybe not so genuine apologetic smile. He shakes his head rubbing the back of his neck as if Orochimaru has made him uncomfortable. Good.

“Can’t be a one off. If it happens again, I can help.” Sakumo insists. Orochimaru realizes then that this is not a fight he will win.

“..Very well.”

Sakumo bids them goodbye. Orochimaru turns his attention to Jiraiya, because if he thinks he’s getting out of explaining what he knows he is terribly mistaken. Jiraiya glances away. Tsuyuko saves him from having to explain at once as she redirects his attention.

“Orochimaru-sensei, I want to go home.”

“Let’s go home.”

## Chapter End Notes

Ngl this chapter fought me hard, ultimately it is what is it, but tis why it took me a while to get out as its been fighting me at every corner.. Despite that I hope you enjoyed! Thank you for reading  
<3



# A dangerous line of thinking...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There isn't another incident of accidental vanishing. Life goes on. Without more evidence on the matter both Orochimaru and Tsuyuko move past it. If it happened again they knew who to seek out, but until that time. They move on.

They have to.

Tsuyuko turns nine, sensei takes her on an out of village scouting mission. It is mundane enough that it should be fine, especially since it was even within the land of fire. Maybe because it's a border village, or that the war still rages- dwindling flames still burn after all. No matter what, Tsuyuko hadn't expected to be thrown into a tree by some enemy shinobi.

It was really rather rude. Her lungs are struggling to expand without horrid pain shooting through her rib cage, so mostly a bruised or broken rib. Which frankly she had no desire to deal with right now. She pushes herself to stand on shaking feet because sitting ducks die and she will not be prey.

So she doesn't even feel bad when Orochimaru-sensei slices one of the enemy shinobi clean in half before he scoops her up mid his next swing, flinging a tagged kunai at the remaining few shinobi.

"Tsuyuko-chan?"

"I think I bruised a rib." She grumbles, trying to bite back the bile that rises in her throat from the pain.

"I will fix it after I take care of the vermin." Orochimaru tells her, Tsuyuko grins through the pain when she realizes what type of paper bomb was tied to the end of his kunai.

The mini battlefield sparks to life.



Who needs birthday candles when you have Jiraiya- san's overpowered explosive tags on hand. Orochimaru-sensei doesn't find it near as funny as she does. His loss really, she thinks she's hilarious.

What is not funny is how her rib flares when she laughs making her dub over in her sensei's arms. Her next breaths are horrible sounding wheezes and Orochimaru-sensei cradles her carefully.

"I think that's probably not just bruised Tsuyuko-chan." Sensei's words are level, he sounds uncaring, but the way he holds her is evidence enough of the contrary. Tsuyuko doesn't fight his chakra that starts to

assess the injury. He's deceptively quiet as he works, if she were feeling better she would have called him out on it.

Called out the way he frowns as he starts to heal her, the way he carefully shifts her as he carries her across treetops. But Tsuyuko is far too tired to notice.

"Trees are hard sensei." She manages when the pressure in her chest starts to ease. It makes way for a yawn, suddenly Tsuyuko is all too aware of how tired she is from this entire ordeal.

Being thrown around was not her idea of a good time.

"Much like your head, stubborn child. Rest, I'll keep you safe." Her head that she snuggles into his shoulder and jounin jacket without any care.

"Mm'kay sensei."

Tsuyuko is out in his arms not even a whole moment later.

Orochimaru sighs. "Absolutely ridiculous child. You would mistake a nearly punctured lung for a broken rib and make jokes about Jiraiya's tags." He continues healing her the entire way back to the village.

Mission completed and counted for success. He had the information he needed. Now he would focus on getting them home.

Minato thinks it far too early for Tsuyuko to be talking as much as she is, especially considering she's supposed to be resting after breaking her ribs on her last mission. Orochimaru-san doesn't seem to be bothered by the non-stop chattering as he sips his coffee, but he also looks more awake than say Jiraiya-sensei who is in the process of cooking breakfast. Jiraiya-sensei looks over his shoulder and sighs at her.

"Why is it always deadly toxins with you first thing in the morning?" Tsuyuko merely shrugs at Jiraiya-sensei. Minato honestly thinks it's a great question, why was it always this line of thought first thing in the morning. Orochimaru-san set's his coffee to the side and gives Tsuyuko a nod when she turns a rather questioning look to him.

So they've already had this conversation then. Minato was rather

curious about how she would answer. During their orphanage days she'd never really given any of them a straight answer on why she liked poisons and such so much. Why medical herbs were where she wanted to direct attention, instead of more traditional shinobi things. Especially for Konoha, because while poison masters weren't uncommon, it still wasn't the norm for their village.

"I think we under utilize them as a village. If Suna can produce high quality lethal poisons and other like things in their climate and conditions, then Konoha with its better suited to growing the same herbs should have a bigger department for it. You can knock down twice as many shinobi with toxic gas versus a single kunai. For a country that seems to stay at war with the surrounding nations you'd think we'd want to find ways to assert ourselves as the dominant nation. To- I don't know- dissuade future conflict." Jiraiya-sensei hums at her explanations, plating their breakfast easily. He sets a plate in front of Minato a moment later, with an expression that pretty clearly reads he's mulling over how he's going to respond to Tsuyuko. Minato doesn't start eating his breakfast immediately.

He considers what his best friend had just said.

She's right.

"War is good for money kid. Or so that's what the daimyo thinks." He tells her as he sits a plate in front of her next.

"Jiraiya." Orochimaru-san's tone is a clear warning. A warning that for some reason gets brushed aside by Tsuyuko as she bites back without missing a beat.

"War is good for nothing." Tsuyuko grumbles, stabbing her chopstick straight into the egg on her plate. Jiraiya-sensei snorts, he pats her head before settling next to Minato. Orochimaru-san sighs at them both. He takes a long sip from his coffee mug.

"I'm not disagreeing with you Tsuyuko-chan."

"Good, cause I'm right. War doesn't prove who was right Jiraiya-san, it only shows who isn't capable of collaboration and compromise." She tells him matter of fact, Minato nods his own agreement with that statement.

One day he hoped... he hoped he'd be able to help more with that sentiment.

“You sound like the Shodai.” Jiraiya mutters, and Tsuyuko’s entire face sours. Minato pins her with a look.

He has heard her bad mouth all three of the hokage so many times. Is she really about to say something to one of the sannin’s faces? She grins at him, and shrugs slowly. Oh kami she is.

“Eh, he didn’t really help the current situation all that much.” Minato groans, he is ignored. Briefly he contemplates flicking food at her so just won’t.

“What makes you think that Tsuyuko-chan?” Orochimaru-san asks with an air that is, well it’s curious and somewhat dark. Tsuyuko must see something else in the look because she smiles. It is not a nice smile.

There is nothing nice about the look she gives both sannin.

It’s sharp , deadly.

Then she speaks, with crisp clear words and purposeful intent.

“Tailed-beasts aren’t bargaining chips number one. Number two, he didn’t really set up systems to prevent malignant entities from getting footholds of power within the village. He and the second both died, and they left their student to pick up the pieces without a proper instruction guide. That’s bad leadership.” Tsuyuko may look sweet and innocent, she may be soft and caring. But she was still a viper. Just like her sensei who seems far too pleased by her answer than he perhaps should be.

Minato felt bad for anyone who forgot that.

“That line of thinking is dangerous Tsuyuko-chan.” Orochimaru-san warns, although he seems hardly committed to the warning. If anything the sannin just seems amused. Tsuyuko rolls her eyes. Minato rubs his hands over his face and just stares at her.

Why is she like this?

“I’m a person of science, sensei, I cannot afford to think about anything blindly. Facts don’t lie.”

“Be that as it may, outside this home, those are dangerous words.” The two have a bit of a moment, where neither blinks. Minato glances over at Jiraiya-sensei who can only seem to sigh at them.

“Do you think you could lead better Tsuyuko-chan?” He interrupts, Minato tries not to feel upset by the question. It shouldn’t burn him the way it does. He knows that Tsuyuko would be a good Hokage, great even, if she wanted... but it’s always been his dream.

Tsuyuko scoffs, before reaching under the table to grab his hand. She squeezes it reassuringly.

“If you’re asking me if I want to be hokage, the answer is no. I’d sooner take over running the hospital than that. I feel sorry for the next person to wear that hat, they’ll have a lot of shit to fix.” Minato wants to help fix the problems he sees, but he’s not convinced he wants to be the one responsible for the majority of that work right now. He does not miss the short pause Tsuyuko makes when she says next person, or the way she carefully regards Orochimaru-san.

The sannin takes another sip from his mug as the genkan door slides open.

“Don’t let Tsunade hear that.” Jiraiya-sensei pitches his voice. Tsunade-san walks into the room, in her full jounin gear and it immediately has both of their teachers standing.

Something is wrong.

He and Tsuyuko share looks.

“Don’t let Tsunade hear what?” Tsunade-san questions with a raised brow as she comes over to ruffle their hair. Tsuyuko without missing a beat looks up and asks with a toothy grin.

“Can I help you run the hospital?”

“Sure, when you can actually reach the help desk.” Tsuyuko huffs, crossing her arms over her chest and sticking out her tongue at the medic.

“Not that we aren’t happy to see you Tsunade, but what are you doing here?” Orochimaru questions carefully, he takes Tsuyuko’s finished plate sans the eggs from her. She doesn’t pout like she usually would about missing a chance to remind Jiraiya-sense that she hates the way he cooks eggs. Her eyes are narrowed in contemplation and she does not look happy in the slightest.

They were going to be left behind again, weren't they.

It's not often the three jounin take missions together, but when they do Minato and Tsuyuko were not allowed to come. Most of their missions were quick turnovers that their young bodies could not handle the stamina to keep up yet. Not to mention high ranking.

So far out of their skill level.

"Our team has been requested for a mission, I've come to fetch you both. We're meant to leave within the next two hours. It's urgent." Tsunade steps out from behind them, she leans against the counter. Which means they'll be leaving straight from here. Urgent but not life threatening.

"How long?"

"A week at minimum. But it will probably take longer, negotiations."

"Wonderful."

"But, who's going to train us?" Tsuyuko manages, her voice only slightly off. Minato gently pats her shoulder.

He knows how much she hates for Orochimaru-san to go on missions without her. How much she worries about them all. Her anxiety would be crippling to any other shinobi, but Tsuyuko used her fear as fuel.

"Traditionally it would be another jounin in our bracket."

"Lucky for you brats, Hiruzen-sensei offered to oversee your training while we're gone."

"Minato, do you think he'll let me reorganize his desk?" Tsuyuko slams her hand into his chest with sudden realization, it doesn't hurt, even if it was uncalled for. Minato pries her hand off his chest and pins her with a look.

Seriously, why did she have so much energy right now?

"I dunno, ask I guess." He grumbles, rubbing his chest for show. She doesn't even pretend to be sorry.

“Hiruzen-sensei’s training is no joke kid.”

“To you maybe, we’re his grand-genin.” Minato sighs, she’s not wrong, not really. Sarutobi-sama was very kind to them. He would probably let them get away with more than he let their teachers.

“Tsuyuko-chan, behave while I am gone. I will not be pleased if you make a menace of yourself.”

Minato decides he’s getting up at that, he has no desire to see them argue. He takes his own plate to the sink to wash.

“Hai sensei.”

“Good. Ask before you reorganize anything on Hiruzen-sensei’s desk.”

“Fine.” Tsuyuko huffs. Minato makes a mental note to remind her.

“A jounin we are friends with will check in on you both too, so behave.” Tsunade tells them once Jiraiya and Orochimaru have both gone to grab their mission kits and or finish getting ready.

“Is it Dan-san?” Minato questions from over his shoulder. They weren’t too acquainted with that many of the jounin in their teacher’s bracket.

“No, because someone insists on butting heads with him.” If Minato were looking he imagined he’d see Tsunade-san giving Tsuyuko an unimpressed look or something similar of the sorts.

“He treats me like a child.” She must by the way Tsuyuko protests. Minato sighs, he continues washing the plate.

“You are a child.”

“I’m offended, Tsunade-sensei.”

“Too bad brat. You’ll have today off but then Hiruzen-sensei will expect you both at the tower in the morning.”

“Boring.” Tsuyuko grumbles as she sulks over to help him dry the dishes.



The Third's 'training' is less training and more Sarutobi-sama telling them about all the crazy shenanigans their sensei's used to get up to. Tsuyuko finds it hilarious, she listens as she sorts a few miniscule things on the Sandaime's desk. Minato is currently asking Sarutobi-sama what he knows about the Nidaime's fuinjutsu, which Tsuyuko is impressed by- it was smart to ask questions about the things you wanted to know from the people who were taught by those that honed said skill.

Tsuyuko of course has no interest in things fuinjutsu related and she promptly tunes that story out. Instead she focuses on the filing system she's been crafting for the Sandaime, labeling small bins with what type of scroll should go in them and whatnot. Everything is fine until the ANBU alerts Sarutobi-sama that he has visitors. Tsuyuko stops what she's doing to watch.

Sarutobi-sama holds his hand up in what is perhaps a common gesture for 'wait, one moment' and then he finishes the explanation he'd been giving Minato.

"It's your teammates." The agent informs him, the mask they're wearing is shaped like a snarling fox. Tsuyuko continues to watch the exchange, Sarutobi-sama rolls his eyes.

"They can still wait. I'm busy." He continues over to the one thing Tsuyuko wants to rearrange more than anything, the massive bookshelf and scroll collection. Minato walks over to where she's sitting and leans against her, chin on shoulder.

Neither are quite sure how they are meant to act right now.

"Sarutobi-sama, Minato and I can leave and work on independent training if our presence is a problem." Sarutobi-sama barely turns to glance at them, a kind smile on his face.

"If those three can't wait then they are no better than academy students. Minato-kun, you have your grandfather's notes, yes?"

"Hai Sarutobi-sama." Minato confirms easily. Sarutobi-sama smiles, then nods slowly.

"Ah good, then the contents of Tobirama-sensei's old journals won't surprise you." He seems relieved. Probably so, because even though they did get a waterdown version of the sex talk at the academy, the

full scope was possibly something he hadn't wanted to do with them.

Luckily for Sarutobi-sama and Jiraiya-san, Tsuyuko took it upon herself after the lesson to give a better explanation to Minato and the others.

"I know about jiji's affair with Senju-sama." Minato is rather blunt, she approves tenfold. Sarutobi-sama snorts this time. Tsuyuko barely contains her own snort at that, this entire topic was always so funny to her. Shinobi were so finicky about love, and while she confirmed with sensei that most hardly cared about things like the biological sex of people.

Some people were just more... reserved? Tsuyuko isn't really sure that's the right idea, sensei had dismissed the outright question of bigotry and bias and bad behavior that she remembered from her first life. He'd been rather callous about it too- stating a simple 'no one has time to care who you sleep with when you're dying on a battlefield'. Blunt, but the point was well made.

Sensei had added later that while shinobi wouldn't typically care, and it was highly uncommon for them to- civilians and more traditionalists would perhaps have an issue.

Sarutobi-sama continues to hum as he browses the shelf. Tsuyuko wants to rearrange the monstrosity so badly. Instead she tries to focus on what he is doing.

"Are you going to let Minato borrow one of the Nidaime's notes?"

"I am, it cannot leave my presence. But I trust you both to not abuse the information." Despite this amount of faith he is placing in them, the honor that he is trusting them with information from his own teacher... Tsuyuko glances down into her lap.

She hates that she has no interest in seals. Hates that she's going to admit to that, because all information is valuable- but this, she can do nothing with this and it feels unfair.

"I have no interest in learning about seals Sarutobi-sama." He doesn't lose that twinkle in his eye and he chuckles. Tsuyuko glances up slowly when he has rejoined them at the desk, he hands Minato the scroll and pats her head. He smiles at them both.

"No, I think not, but there are more than just seals in Tobirama-sensei's journals. You may find something that interests you. They did

your own sensei. Both of you go- sit on the small couch, and this looks good so far Tsuyuko-kun you will have to explain it to me afterwards.” Tsuyuko knows deep down she should be wary of the Sandaime. That she shouldn’t trust him. But he has been nothing but kind to her, he much like sensei has not given her a reason not to. She can’t rely on information from a past life that has thus far held no merit.

“Hai Sarutobi-sama.” They do as they are told, huddling together on the small loveseat. Sarutobi-sama sighs as he glances towards the ANBU agent who has stood silently watching the entire exchange.

“Alright let them in.” Despite wanting to give most people the benefit of a doubt there was one person who had already proved untrustworthy. Tsuyuko’s guard is up before the door even opens. She mentally prepares for a fight of some variety.

Minato must notice how she tenses beside him, his own hackles raised. Tsuyuko makes a mental note to inform him about their watchers later. For now, she discreetly taps his arm and redirects his attention to the journal. She wanted to see how this was going to play out. Wanted to see if Sarutobi-sama was who he was playing up to be.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! <3

# Highly improbable, but never impossible

~.~

They don't set up camp, there are no tents, no fire, no bedrolls. Just three highly ranking jounin who take to the trees and take turns keeping watch. None of them sleep, not in any real sense of the word. Orochimaru sits with his back pressed into cold bark, Tsunade sits next to him, arm draped over his leg, face pressed into his knee. He isn't sure why she's doing this, he also doesn't particularly want to ask either. Jiraiya stands at the far end of the sturdy branch.

Orochimaru doesn't think they'll speak. Not that he minds the silence, but it is rather odd for neither of them to not have anything to say. Jiraiya sighs after a long moment, it's a cautious thing. He raises a brow when his teammate turns to regard him carefully. So they were going to talk then it seemed.

"What's going on with your kid?" Jiraiya questions less than cautiously.

"You tell me." He challenges without missing a beat knowing good and well Jiraiya will not just tell him what he knows. Why would he now when he hadn't bothered for months?

His teammate was very lucky that he hadn't ended up murdered for it. Or seriously maimed for it.

"Has she spontaneously vanished again?"

"..No.." Tsunade narrows her eyes at them both, perhaps they forgot to fill her in on that detail. Orochimaru makes a mental note to do so later, maybe she has something to add that Jiraiya can't.

"Hands are tied." Jiraiya mock surrenders. Orochimaru considers his teammate for a terse moment.

"If I threatened to gut you would you be more inclined to tell me." He precures a kunai and waves it loosely. Jiraiya's returning grin is something wild and untamed like him. Tsunade snorts. He matches Jiraiya's grin tenfold, it's far more threatening than perhaps necessary.

But since the oaf was keeping pertinent information from him, well

frankly he deserved a few mostly harmless threats.

“Depends on how you threaten. I could use a nice rearranging of my guts, everything has been all backed up again.” Orochimaru doesn’t miss the innuendo, but he does ignore it.

“Drink less sake and more black coffee.” Jiraiya doesn’t stop grinning like a fool.

“Orochimaru, what is going on with Tsuyuko-chan? You know something.” Tsunade redirects, poking him unrepentantly in the face. He mimes biting her in response, he needs to consider the options of the best answer for this particular question.

There were a lot of things going on with his student at any given moment. None that were threatening to them at current times, however, one could never be too cautious. He wasn’t above asking for a second opinion if the means required it.

Besides, this could be something they might want to help him with. But was now really the time for this conversation? Perhaps not, but he felt safer having this conversation now versus inside the walls of the village.

But the floorboards could speak, there are surely stories they could tell. Orochimaru didn’t trust the walls to keep his secrets. Whereas the forest would never tell.

It’s a calculated risk, one he has to take. He will not let anything happen to his student.

“If someone were to tell you that I was going to go rogue would you believe them?” He settles on for now, a good segway into what he wants to discuss with them. His question warrants a look of slight displeasure from his teammates. A not so concealed wariness.

So they did think it was possible then. He isn’t offended, he knows the possibility while low was never zero. Highly improbable, but never truly impossible.

“Depends on what reasoning they’d give. Is someone saying nasty shit again, do I need to talk sense into some people? I’m sure Tsuyuko will be happy to help.”

“Do not make my student violent, Tsunade. So you believe that I could

go rogue?" She shrugs so he glances over to gauge Jiraiya's reaction.

"I mean, if something were to happen to the kid- probably." Jiraiya finally grumbles. The very idea ignites something icy inside him. He has to clamp down hard on his emotional reaction not to leak killer intent at his own teammates.

That wouldn't be a polite thing to do.

"Nothing is going to happen to her."

"Of course not." Tsunade pats his knee, he won't fight her chakra as it brushes against his telling him to calm down. He takes a deep steadying breath.

"Jiraiya, what's your opinion on the multiverse theory?" If Jiraiya is startled by the direct question and the seemingly redirection he doesn't show it. Instead his brows furrow as he rubs his chin, taking the question seriously.

"Complicated, possible, but complicated. The toads would know more. Why? You're being more cryptic than normal." Orochimaru ignores the finger being waved in his face, he ignores the sharp look on Tsunade's face.

"Just curious. How would you two feel if I murdered sensei's friend." He redirects, testing the waters. Tsunade's expression doesn't change, if anything she looks far more amused by the notion than should be acceptable.

Talks of murdering council members would perhaps be treason. But they knew all too well what kind of cretin Shimura was.

"Shimura?" It's not really a question, more a clarifying statement. Orochimaru doesn't look away from the wary glance he receives from Jiraiya.

"Mhhhm."

"Did you know that the slugs have developed an acid that dissolves most everything, including human remains." Tsunade offers it easily. He makes a mental note to ask about that particular fact later, it

sounds fascinating and Tsuyuko would probably get a kick out of knowing about it.

Not that it would change what summoning contract she would be offered. Despite training to be a medic, she would be a researcher first. The snake clan had already laid claim to her.

“Good to know Tsunade.”

“I don’t like it in principle, but... his goons have been watching our training sessions.” Jiraiya sits down next to Tsunade, who frankly looks appalled by that. She would, considering how Shimura has been trying to scout Nawaki’s Hyuga friend for some time.

“Yes, Tsuyuko enjoys pointing them out.” He muses carefully, Jiraiya doesn’t look surprised by that information. He shrugs.

“I don’t think Minato has noticed.”

“Tsuyuko knows to be aware of them.”

“Why?” Tsunade all but demands, he hums.

“Because she knows what ROOT is.”

“You told her?”

“No.”

“Then how?” But he does not answer the question, not directly anyhow. Not yet. He needs them to put it together for themselves.

In order to do so he needs to give them one more hint. Orochimaru absently spins a kunai in his hand.

“Suppose that there is a universe where I ended up being evil, and that universe was sold as a picture book for children to read.”  
Orochimaru goes straight to the jugular with this question, no point sugar coating anything now.

“Not surprising I guess, where does the kid fit into this?”

“I don’t see how that’s relevant to the current conversation.

“Come now, surely the two of you are smart enough to put it

together.” Now he was finally at the heart of the matter. The almost answer to his teammates' original question. What ever was going on with his student?

There is a half beat, Jiraiya blinks before scowling.

“No.” He can't help but to grin, the disbelief is so amusing.

“Yes.”

“No, reincarnation with memories intact is highly improbable.” Jiraiya argues.

“But not impossible.” He counters, Tsunade scoffs.

“It would explain why she picks up academics easily.”

“So does every other prodigy in her generation.”

“You don't actively teach her, if you did you'd realize she's pretending to learn majority of the time. Not because it's too difficult, but because she already knows the answers. Very rarely am I teaching her something new. Honestly the brat seems bored.” Tsunade turns her focus on him leaving Jiraiya sputtering in the background. They should be moving soon, in reality they've sat long enough they should be well rested to continue their travel.

They needed to move. The sooner they reach their destination the sooner negotiations can begin and the sooner he can get back to the village, back to his apprentice.

“Tsuyuko was an accredited doctor.” He tells them, brushing Tsunade off him to stand. They follow suit easily.

“I.. can see that. She acts more like a doctor than a medic. What did she specialize in?”

“Infectious Disease, she was in the middle of writing a thesis on a new disease in her first life when she died unexpectedly.” It is perhaps more information than exactly needed, but it feels necessary to tack on. Because Tsuyuko was, is still, that doctor, it would do none of them any good to treat her otherwise.



His student was on par in intellectual skill when it comes to his and Tsunade's fields and it would be in her best interest to be taken seriously. She has brilliant ideas, she just needs them to listen and offer support for them.

"Yeah, okay, that tracks." Tsunade mutters, retying her hair.

"Tsunade you can't be taking this seriously." Jiraiya continues to grumble but Orochimaru can see the wheels turning, he knows that despite the argument his teammate is already heavily weighing the probability.

Jiraiya wasn't an idiot. Not really. He just wanted others to believe he was.

"I don't see any reason not to. Why aren't you?" Tsunade counters barely sparing Jiraiya a glance.

"Reincarnation is rare, extremely so. Reincarnation with memories is nearly impossible."

"Improbable, not impossible." Orochimaru tunes out the argument as he checks his pack and tightens his sandals. Anticipation builds under his skin, crawling, creeping, the longer they linger the more unsettled he begins to feel.

They need to move.

"I need proof. Have you considered she's a plant?" Jiraiya adjusted his weapons pouch and ridiculously oversized scroll. Orochimaru scowls at him tuning back in for that particular accusation, the suggestion while reasonable he supposed was still highly annoying.

The idea of Tsuyuko being some kind of plant is laughable. It hadn't even been his first thought when she revealed what she knew to him. Her blatant hatred of ROOT agents and him working with them was nearly enough of a reason as to why she wouldn't be one.

Shinobi learned to feign an array of emotions, it was just part of their day to day life, lying and deceiving. They learned to fake love, to fake remorse and even happiness. But hatred.. Well hatred wasn't an emotion that could be faked with any real merit. Hatred was a raw and visceral emotion, it scorched everything in its wake burning with no deviation. It's why shinobi so often were warned against feeling

true hatred, because it had the ability to take them too far every single time.

The way she responded, the distrust that lingered, the fear that followed. That wasn't a practiced reaction. No, it was too raw to be anything but her true feelings. She wasn't a plant, honestly with how loudly she felt her emotions she would never be geared towards undercover work.

There was nothing about his student that was disingenuous to who she is inherently as a person.

"Yes. She's not. Beyond being far too emotional, even for ROOTs cover agents, she doesn't have the seal."

"You checked?" Orochimaru manages an unimpressed raised brow instead of straight up scowling at him then. Who did Jiraiya take him for? It would take more than a dewy eyed genin to make him lose all sense of self, only a fool wouldn't have verified the information Tsuyuko supplied.

"Of course I checked. She presented me with a highly improbable scenario, only a fool wouldn't double and triple check to make sure they weren't being deceived. I am no fool." It's his turn to grumble at them, this was now bordering tiring. He missed the days when they'd just take his words at face value.

"No, you aren't." Finally they come to an agreement.

He hums, holding up his hand to stall the conversation they need to move. Tsunade and Jiraiya nod. Orochimaru knows he'll be interrogated at their next stop.

The three elders gaze shifts over to them- "What are these children doing here?" one scoffs, Tsuyuko bites the inside of her cheek to keep from snarling. Funny they would consider them children right now, but not when they send them to battlefields that they curated.

"These 'children' are the genin apprentices of my r students. I'm

watching their studies while the sannin are out of the village. Is that going to be an issue, Mitokado?" Sarutobi-sama challenges as he takes his seat.

Tsuyuko learns a lot from that interaction alone. One, she finally knows where sensei learned his icy glare from, and two Sarutobi-sama was most likely not friends with his former genin teammate.

Shimura Danzo looked far too amused by the interaction for it to be a coincidence.

He turns to look at her, he is appraising her. Tsuyuko narrows her eyes in return. Minato looks up over the scroll and he must not like what he sees because he glares hard. Honey and sap pour from his mouth as he speaks, "It's very rude to stare."

"You must be Jiraiya's student, ill-mannered just like him." Shimura muses, tone bored, like he hasn't had his goons watching them for months on end. Minato takes a moment to consider his words, then he smiles bright and sharp.

Much like Jiraiya's was when he thought no one was watching.

Tsuyuko interjects. Because Minato has airs to maintain and she has no such cares of ideals of pretense.

"The only ill-mannered person here is you. It's rude to stare. Sarutobi-sama had his entire schedule blocked out this morning for our training and then you three sprung a meeting on him at the last minute demanding attention like toddlers. He made you wait for his time, because time is valuable and it was already promised to us. You would think three people who sit on the highest council in the land would recognize that training the genin you're going to send to battlefields of not their own creation was more important than a meeting about the silk market." But where Minato's smile is sharp, Tsuyuko's is sinister.

"You must be Orochimaru's student. You sound just like him." Utatane manages after a moment. Tsuyuko regards the elder with a cold stare. Completely unimpressed with the assessment, sensei would have just called them stupid to their faces.

She of course tells them that. With all the grace of a nine year old who lacks a filter, and the ability to give a damn about the consequences.

Sarutobi-sama doesn't even bother to hide his laugh.

“The disrespect. Are you going to let this brat talk to us like that?”

“Tsuyuko-kun is correct, Orochimaru-kun would have just called you stupid. A more accurate statement would be that she acts like Tsunade-hime.”

“Tsunade-sensei says it’s better to tell people why they’re stupid versus just telling them you think they’re stupid.” The reaction was usually worth having to spell it out in layman's terms.

“She got that honest form Tobirama-sensei.”

“He is rather blunt in his journals.”

“You are letting these children read the Nidaime’s journals?”

“It is only fair since their teachers have. Are the three of you going to get to the point or can this actually wait until later.”

“Have you reviewed the trade proposal from Ame yet?”

“I have.”

“What are your thoughts?”

“None that I am willing to share at this time.”

“Hiruzen, a trade agreement with Ame would be beneficial to stave off any future thoughts of war.”

“No it wouldn’t. Trade agreements do not guarantee alliance ships. If that were the case then Kiri wouldn’t have annihilated Uzu. Uzushio-gakure who we had an alliance ship with and should have protected, but what good were our trade agreements there.” Minato barely glances up from whatever section of the scroll he was reading. He’s committed to saying his piece, but he also doesn’t seem to be fully invested in the reaction it will cause. Tsuyuko looks around to gauge the expressions of the adults.

Sarutobi-sama looks pained, and distantly proud. Danzo and the other two have a large array of emotion on their faces, and Tsuyuko doesn’t believe any of them for a moment. When Sarutobi-sama sighs it draws the three elders' attention back to him and away from Minato.

“The honesty of genin, it is a humbling thing. If that was all the three of you wanted you are dismissed. I am busy.” A clear dismissal one that they try to ignore.

Tsuyuko tunes out the mild protesting to point to something very poignant on the scroll for Minato. It should show him in the right direction for his own theory. She doesn't meet Sarutobi-sama's gaze until the office door clicks shut with an audible sign.

"You two are going to be a force to reckon with when you are jonin. Headache inducing like your senseis. I look forward to it, and I look forward to seeing both of you become strong shinobi." He seems genuine. Like he actually means what he tells them.

"Some headaches remind us of our humanity." She chirps. Not quite patronizing.

"That they do Tsuyuko-chan. Minato-kun, I would like an elaboration on your statement."

"Oh, yea, sorry I hadn't meant to say that out loud." He absolutely had, the world may perceive Minato to be innocent and kind but Tsuyuko knew better. She knew that he was capable of more than just tempered kindness. It would only get them so far.

"I'm glad you did, the reminder was a good one for those three. I am curious how you came to that conclusion though." Sarutobi-sama asks with an easy tone, Tsuyuko can't find a trace of hostility or anything to be concerned about.

"Of course Sarutobi-sama. I'm not in trouble am I?" Minato hesitates, but the Hokage simply chuckles.

"I see no reason for you to be. You merely stated the truth. Sometimes old people forget how much the younger generation sees and hears, we forget that this world we are curating is for your future."

The rest of their training session is spent with Minato and Tsuyuko filling Sarutobi-sama in on everything they have noticed as genin during a transitional period. Not quite out of war, and not quite in the threshold of the next. Tsuyuko tentatively brings up their watchers, even though she probably shouldn't. Sarutobi-sama does not appear happy when she does.

"I have not assigned either of you ANBU watchers." He mutters, eyes dark, and Tsuyuko is glad she brought them up then. Nothing more is said on the matter, and Tsuyuko gets the feeling their watchers will be harder to spot going forward. She's looking forward to the challenges.

Sarutobi-sama walks them home that evening, unbeknownst to the

two children he places extra security on his student's home. An extra measure until he can figure out why Danzo is interested in his student's students. Hiruzen won't say he doesn't trust Danzo's intentions, but he's not going to let him have unchecked access to the sannin's apprentices. Those genin are their future, he meant what he told them.

They were going to be a force to be reckoned with, he was looking forward to the era of change they would usher in.

# Home again, home again

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Orochimaru contemplates kicking Jiraiya off the bed. He's tired, he hates long negotiations and yet that's what they've spent the last several hours doing on their sensei's behalf. This entire thing feels overkill for what he knows will not remain a settlement, he knows that tension will continue to remain high following the proposed end of war. Everything will be fragile, it will be easy to fix another war in the aftermath of this.

The notion of peace is terrifying, because he knows it will not last.

He glares at Jiraiya who doesn't even acknowledge the glare. Instead continue to pester Orochimaru about his student. Really, how uncouth. While he knew they would expect more answers from him, he was really hoping that they would have let him rest first.

But unfortunately that seems not to be the case.

"So she reincarnated not only with her memories of being a doctor but also memories of a story that could have been this one?" Jiraiya pokes his ankle, Orochimaru sighs sitting up then.

Since he will not be allowed to rest. He indulges.

"Yes. It's a rather interesting tale." Cryptically because if Jiraiya was going to be annoying two could play that game.

"What happens?" Jiraiya of course doesn't let that fly and demands an explanation. Orochimaru wonders if the storyteller inside his teammate will appreciate the tale he's about to tell them.

He surely hadn't when Tsuyuko told him her story.

Due to the nature of the topic he only wants to go over these details once, a simple overview of what could be their future. Orochimaru ignores Jiraiya's question until Tsunade has joined them on the bed. She takes a seat next to him holding out a hair brush with a clear demand. He takes the brush with a raised brow and a slight roll of eyes, changing his position to lotus so Tsunade can sit in front of him.

He starts the process of detangling his teammates hair and thinks about the best way to answer Jiraiya's question.

How much detail can truly be spared. Eventually he settled on something blunt. But frankly to the point.

"You adopt three orphans from ame sometime in the next five years, Nawaki dies during a mission gone wrong soon after he becomes a genin, I start experimenting on children on the orders of the council. Sakumo inadvertently starts a war after this one, then later commits suicide. Minato gets appointed to be Hokage, I flee the village, and sometime later the nine tails attack the village. That is just the overview of the next fourteen years."

A stripped down to bare grounds of everything that his student has told him. It was enough to visibly unsettle both of his teammates.

"Shit." Tsunade curses, he shares the sentiment.

"Yea, no. We will not be doing that." Jiraiya crosses his arms, finally on board with the entire idea of reincarnation with memories. Orochimaru hums, he proceeds to braid Tsunade's hair out of her face, tying the braid off at the end and setting the brush on the bed. The brush is handed over to Jiraiya who seals it away for later. Not even bothering to do anything with his own wild mane. Truly barbaric.

Orochimaru leans against the wall, glancing over at the privacy tag placed earlier in the evening. They were safe here, there was no chance to be overheard. A shame that it takes being outside the village for him to confide in them. He could not risk this information getting in the wrong hand, he had been lucky his home was sealed as it was.

"Exactly, which is why I will be murdering Shimura. He orchestrates nearly all of it."

"Of course he does. What a bastard." Tsunade scoffs, flinging herself backwards on the bed. Again he doubts any of them will truly sleep but rest of some kind will be good for them.

"Truly." Bastard was probably the nicest way to describe his current feelings on Shimura. Scum of the earth, vile cretin, menace upon society as a whole was a more accurate description though. But for now bastard would suffice.



Orochimaru has nothing to add at the current moment, instead he pulls his own hair down from the tight confines of a bright yellow scrunchy that most certainly was not his. How hadn't he noticed until now he'd grabbed the wrong hair tie. Thankfully his student had a plethora of other ties at her disposal and would not miss this one. Slowly he finger combs his hair, careful of the tangles that have made themselves apparent just now to his utter annoyance. The brush reappears in front of him.

Why must his hair knot so horribly on missions? He offers Jiraiya a quick nod of thanks before continuing. He would loathe to lay down with knotted hair and have it turn to matts.

"Do you have a plan for Shimura?"

"Yes, it can wait until we finish this mission." He dismisses this discussion before it can begin. Jiraiya sighs, knowing they will get nothing more from him tonight.

"You sure?"

"I am."

There is nothing tangible he can do now about the dirty councilman. It will take time and careful consideration, even with Tsunade and Jiraiya's support. They could not afford to act rashly here. No matter how much he'd rather do something now and be done with Shimura before he could hurt his people, Orochimaru knows they have to be careful. Shimura already had his forces watching them, sudden changes in pattern and behavior could spell something horrible for their students. He was not willing to risk Tsuyuko and Minato's life over rash action.

Orochimaru had prepared for the long game. He wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty. If it meant keeping the kids safe, it would be well worth it. But no matter what they do, what he does, it has to be done right. It cannot come back to bite them. It cannot come back to bite Tsuyuko.

He would not allow her to get hurt over his choices. She trusted him with her knowledge of their future and Orochimaru wasn't going to let his student down.

“Tsuyuko has seen a lot of her friends die hasn’t she?” Tsunade questions suddenly as if it has just occurred to her. Orochimaru nods slowly.

“In the story she read, yes. Including us overtime.” He knew that several of their deaths were frequent in her nightmares. Orochimaru couldn’t even begin to imagine how that felt. To know with such certainty the ends of those you love and not knowing if you’ll be able to save them from a supposed fate.

“You should check her yin and yang levels. Reincarnation has probably thrown them into wack. Might explain the migraines.” Jiraiya adds carefully. Like he doesn’t trust his own assessment or something ridiculous. It was a good theory, one in which has already been tested.

“Her ratio is 3-2, with higher yin levels. Her nature is also water and earth.”

“That’s not fairly common for the land of fire.” No it was not. But he never said Tsuyuko was from the land of fire. She knew two things about her origins with certainty, one she was reincarnated and two she had no biological family in Hirofu.

There was no database in current existence where he could run her DNA through to even begin to look for a more concrete origin. But there was at least on plus side to the nature of his work, he had been able to verify the existence of at least one shinobi parent.

“She’s certainly the biological child of at least one shinobi. Her coils are the right size for it. She doesn’t struggle with chakra manipulation like most strictly civilian born shinobi.” He tells them unbothered by what that statement admits to.

“How much testing have you done on your student Orochimaru?” Tsunade of course is not impressed in the slightest it seems.

“Just the basics. Tsuyuko-chan found all the tests fascinating.” Orochimaru needed answers and Tsuyuko enjoyed testing theories. It was a win-win for them both.

“Of course she did, little weirdo.”

“Shh Jiraiya, obviously she takes after her sensei.”

“More like dad.” He shoots them both a glare.

"I'm not her father."

"I'd bet my entire estate that you consider yourself her father and that she considers the same." Tsunade doesn't miss a beat to bet against him. Orochiamru considers their last bet, *which he lost*, and decides fuck it.

"Are you sure that's a wager you want to make Tsunade-hime?"

"Yes. I know I'm right. My eyes work just fine, and you are utterly soft when it comes to the brat."

"She is my student."

"I'm not that soft with Minato." Jiraiya counters, he gets an unimpressed look from them both. Pot meets kettle. Orochimaru scoffs. He finally finishes untangling his own hair.

"You are an idiot."

"Now Tsunade, tell us about Dan. You have not been complaining about him nearly as much." Orochimaru redirects, Tsunade sits up on her elbows to glare at him. She is ignored.

"I've been busy teaching your brat iryoninjutsu, even though she apparently only needs the ninjutsu part of the lessons." Tsunade quips, not quite teasingly. Orochimaru rolls his eyes. No need for his teammate to seem so hurt over the matter.

"She's out of practice by a decade, trust me she needs the full lessons. Just talk to her like you would an older shinobi."

"How old is she?" Jiraiya questions, and Orochimaru considers the serious expression and wonders if Jiraiya is actually an idiot. He was there when they celebrated her birthday, he gave her chunin grade explosives for her birthday.

"Jiraiya- her birthday was recently, surely you remember she just turned nine."

"Is she actually nine?" Orochimaru deadpans at the frankly dumb

question. He hopes Jiraiya can read the disappointment clear on his face.

“Yes, while she may possess the memories of an adult, her body is still a child. She is a child despite what she may try to argue.”

“Adult memories in a child’s brain could be very problematic.” Tsunade sits up fully, considering them both. He can see the cogs turning as she compiles her own conclusion from that. Orochimaru nods, gesturing with the brush loosely.

“Why do you think she had that sudden meltdown.”

“That’s what that was?”

“Very much so. Her brain could not process the distress her emotions were causing her in a reasonable timeframe to how her memories said they should. Tsuyuko was firmly aware that her reaction was purely emotional. Usually her ability to process and handle her emotions is much better, but add in the sleep deprivation and the migraine.” Especially the sleep deprivation, he needs to get to the bottom of her absolutely deplorable sleeping habits soon. He would hate to have to get her a prescription for something like ambien at her age.

She shouldn’t require something like that yet, however, he knew better than anyone else how utterly horrible her sleep was. It was an often enough occurrence that he found himself making them both milk tea in the middle of the night.

“Ticking time bomb.” Tsunade mumbles. Ticking time bomb indeed. He would hate to see his student implode upon herself again.

“She’s going to be an absolute menace when she’s grown isn’t she.” Jiraiya grumbles as if they haven’t already discussed this.

“It’s going to be fun to watch.” He agrees, because it will be fun to watch.

Very fun if everything works out the way he wants it to. A future where his student takes over for him, and Tsunade. One in which they have paved the way for better bureaucracy at a kage level. Orochimaru would love to see a future where both his and Jiraiya students were leading their generation. Minato would be a good Hokage, but...

“It’s probably a good thing she has no aspirations for kageship.”

Tsunade settles on, Orochimaru offers a non committed hum. Tsuyuko wouldn't be a good hokage, not like Minato would or will be.

"Perhaps so."

"What about you Orochimaru, have your genin dream's changed?" He considers what Jiraiya is really asking him, did he still want to be hokage?

He knows that even if his plans with Shimura work the way they want, there will still be another war despite their efforts here. It really wouldn't be fair to throw the hat at a freshly minted war hero Minato. Not when the structural integrity of the village will still be so frail. While the imminent threat of the nine tails attack won't hold the same heat, that period of time will be temperamental at best. Minato would be too young to really push through the sludge that will rise as they repair the infrastructure.

"If sensei asks I won't say no."

"He'd be a fool not to ask."

"Let's hope sensei isn't a fool then." He hums. Nothing more to say to that really. Because he could hope all he wanted that sensei would make a smart choice, but with the current state of Shimura still being around...

He had his doubts.

"It's a shame that if you become Hokage next Nawaki will have to fight Minato for the title after you."

"Currently they are both far too soft for the prospect." Besides, if Orochimaru is honest, the leader of their village needed to not have affiliation with the big clans going forward ( *a sentiment shared with his own student* ) . Someone who did not have those ties or clan loyalty to blind them would be better suited in the long run for the prosperity of Konoha's future. Minato is always going to be his first choice to succeed him if all goes according to plan.

He of course does not share that thought with his teammates.

Just like he does not confirm Tsunade's earlier accusation.

Orochimaru is exhausted when they return, it's a bone deep exhaustion that comes with long days of negotiation and long nights of assassination plots. Tsuyuko of course is awake waiting for him when he returns, the child is standing in the threshold of their shared wing of the estate holding a glass of what appears to be milk tea. She blinks sleepily at him, which means unlike his last mission without her she had actually been sleeping, good.

He does not like the idea of her not sleeping because he is gone. Growing bodies need rest. Orochimaru would hate for her insomnia to come back and bite her.

"Welcome home sensei." Tsuyuko practically chirps, despite her sleep riddle voice.

"Thank you Tsuyuko-chan. Did you and Minato behave while we were gone?" She of course merely shrugs. Orochimaru is too tired to ask further questions tonight. He makes a mental note to ask again in the morning. There is something not quite innocent about her shrug. It's a very suspicious shrug if he's being quite honest.

"Sensei..." Tsuyuko hesitates before walking over to join him in the kitchen, she stops just shy of bumping into his leg. He's impressed by her restraint.

"Yes child?" He pulls a cup down for some water. Tsuyuko sips her tea before answering.

"Are you hurt this time?" Orochimaru raises his brow at the question. Truly, and utterly ridiculous notion considering who he'd gone on his mission with. Nonetheless he appreciates his students concern.

"No, I am not. Besides, if I were, do you think Tsunade would return me in worse condition?"

"Ah, that's a fair point..." A fair point his prodigious student hasn't considered in her sleep deprived state. Orochimaru can only sigh.

"Come now it's well past your bedtime and I know that if I send you to your room you will just stay awake."

"My room is cold." Tsuyuko of course complains, hardly missing a beat as she does. Now she does press her small, horribly cold body into his leg. For heaven's sake.

Orochimaru pats her head.

“It is nearing winter.”

“I missed you. I don’t like it when you leave me behind sensei.” She pouts, and he takes the empty tea cup from her hand and places it next to the sink to wash in the morning. While usually he wouldn’t let a dish sit, it is late and he is exhausted. Orochimaru contemplates his student’s statement.

*It's because you are spoiled Tsuyuko-chan.* He doesn’t quip, even though it’s partially true instead he sighs and settles on a simple. “It’s good to be home.”

Orochimaru never utilized his home before, not to the full standards of what makes a home. Not like this- the estate felt like a home now with art and decoration and all the standard signs of a shinobi inhabitant household, but without the same cold that came with shinobi living. It’s warm in a way that it never was before Tsuyuko came into his life. The Yashagouro estate was a cold, near forgotten relic of a time long past. But here, it was a home. His home. Shared with his best friend, and their students.

There was a part of him that was looking forward to watching both Tsuyuko and Minato grow into themselves in this home. Taking an apprentice, even after he swore it wasn’t for him, it had allowed him a new purpose. Life did not feel so desolate now. After Jiraiya’s injury, after their fight... Well he wasn’t sure what was going to amount of his teammates then.

But now, he couldn’t imagine going into the future without them by his side. And he knows deep within his being that the sole reason for that is the child half awake leaning into his leg. Tsuyuko glances up slowly, losing a battle against yawning. Utterly ridiculous child.

Orochimaru picks her up.

“Time for bed Tsuyuko-chan.”

“Okay sensei.”

Tsuyuko is out in his arms before he even reaches the hall's entrance. He carries her to her room. In the morning he will get the details of how her training with Sarutobi-sensei went, and inform her of Tsunade and Jiraiya’s few thoughts on the entire matter of her reincarnation. For now, he tucks her into her bed with an extra

blanket, quickly tities her medical notes strewn across the side table before turning off the sole lamp. Orochimaru shuts the door behind him, heading down the hall to set a towel in the bathroom for in the daylight morning before heading to his own room for the rest of the night.

There is a brief sound of someone on the other side of the house moving about, either Jiraiya restless post mission or Minato getting up to use the bathroom in the middle of the night. Either way it's none threatening and does not require his attention. Orochimaru continues to his room, closing the door quietly to not awake Tsuyuko. His room is exactly as he left it in his haste to leave for the urgent mission, except, sitting on the bed is a funny slightly misshapen knitted snake.

What a peculiar thing. Orochimaru has only one hunch as to the origins of the snake. Tsuyuko had been so shy when she mentioned one particular hobby she missed from her first life. He picks up the snake and under the yarn body is a note.

*~Sensei, for when I can't go with you*

He cannot help but to smile. It's good to be home.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading! I hope you enjoyed the chapter <3 <3



# Reminder of facts, the only warning you get...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Usually he would have gone home long before now. There was no real reason for him to still be working this late, everything he was doing at his desk he could honestly be doing from his home. But... there was a feeling building in his gut that urged him to stay a little longer than he usually would. He takes a sip from his small glass of tea, as the snarling fox mask appears behind him, ready to defend if the need arises.

Hiruzen hopes for Danzo's sake it doesn't come to that. He would hate to have to kill his childhood friend.

"You have no business being here this late Danzo. Sneaking in like this, it does not look good for you old friend." His tone wry, eyes set where the shadow is the darkest. Danzo scoffs and the shadow around him falls.

"One could say the same to you.. Old friend." Danzo steps away from the bookshelf, perhaps he thinks Hiruzen doesn't notice the scroll in his waist belt. He does, he will wait to mention it.

"What are you here for Danzo?" He of course has his suspicions. But he wants to see if his fellow will be honest. Hiruzen will remember if Danzo lies here.

Just as he remembers all the times before his friend lied to him. (*"Why are you chasing Orochimaru?" "I simply wanted to talk with him." That's not how Orochimaru told it, and Hiruzen was inclined to believe his student over Danzo. What kind of jounin sensei would he be if he didn't take them for their word?*)

"I wanted to make sure the Nidaime's scroll was safe, after you let those genin touch it. Honestly Hiruzen, those children should not have had access to his work." A half truth then followed by an attempt at scolding, Hiruzen sighs. He folds his hands on his desk and contemplates that particular statement.

Those children were prodigious genin. Those children were smarter than his own council seemed to want to give them credit for. Those children were their future. Whether Danzo liked it or not.

“It is not yours to worry over Danzo.” The reminder is that, a reminder. Danzo was not the Hokage, and as such he had no claim over articles owned and collected by the previous Hokage. These scrolls were the hat’s inheritance. One day he hopes to relinquish his care of them to someone who will be able to appreciate the library in full.

Someone who knew what it meant to preserve information over hiding it.

“I suppose not.” Danzo mumbles, Hiruzen finds himself sighing. This game, this conversation was already exhausting.

“Since you are here, answer me this- why do you have your agent watching the sannins students?” He questions, Danzo in turn barely raises his brow.

“I’m afraid you’re mistaken. I haven’t a clue what you are talking about Hiruzen.” Hiruzen sits back, he folds his hands in his lap. Briefly looking behind him to find Inari ready to pounce. Danzo had just lied to him, no hesitation.

Hiruzen would remember this lie.

“Hmm, is that so? Inari, when you escorted Minato and Tsuyuko home, how many blank masked ANBU did you spot?”

“Eight, Sandaime-sama. The day before there were six.” Inari doesn’t hesitate to inform, their voice void of all emotion as expected of ANBU- however the agents usually composed chakra flickers with life. It reminds him of a building tension, ready to devour everything within its wake.

He had no doubt that if Inari decided that Danzo was a threat here and now they would take him down without hesitation or remorse. Danzo’s visible hand twitches. Hiruzen regards them both closely, deciding that he was going to keep Inari tasked with making sure Tsuyuko and Minato were not being observed by anyone right now.

“Thank you Inari. Now, Danzo, perhaps you would be interested in telling me the truth. I did not approve any request for those two to have watchers- of any kind.”

“Considering their prodigy status, I figured watchers were warranted.” The response does not please Hiruzen in the slightest. He sighs.

“Be that as it may, as they are my students’ students, any watchers are to be approved by me and as it stands I see no reason for either Minato and Tsuyuko to need them. They are loyal to the village.” He thinks Orochimaru’s student is less loyal to the village and more to the people inside it but that is not something he feels the need to share with Danzo. It is not anything Hiruzen finds concern in, Tsuyuko wouldn’t turn on the leaf. She cares far too deeply for her peers for that.

It was good enough for him.

“You are too soft on your students.” Danzo of course scoffs. Hiruzen finds himself rolling his eyes. He stands, tapping Inari’s arm a clear *stand down* - for now, and steps around the desk.

“You are entitled to your opinion, old friend, but it is still an opinion. Call off your agents, if I hear any more reports of them spying on my genin I will not be pleased.”

“As you wish.” Hiruzen considers that statement as he stands face to face with his friend. He reaches out, hand on shoulder and meets Danzo’s suspicious gaze easily.

“Danzo.”

“Yes, Hiruzen?” Danzo replies, it almost feels like it once was. Hiruzen does not regret what he has to do next. He knows that he must give this warning.

Knows that without it Danzo will undoubtedly go after Orochimaru and Jiraiya’s students. He can not have that. He can not have them. Minato and Tsuyuko are their future, and Hiruzen would protect the village’s future no matter what.

“Do not take my kindness here for granted. For now I am still treating you as a friend, do not forget that. Do not make yourself to be an enemy. ” He pats Danzo’s shoulder before letting go, he does not turn his back to Danzo now. Hiruzen would not make that mistake again. Instead he appraises his old friend.

“We are not enemies.” Danzo replies easily enough, there is no sincerity in his words, his gaze betrays him. Hiruzen smiles, he is sure it doesn’t reach his eyes.

“I would hope not. You are my oldest friend. However, if you hurt my

students or their students- I cannot promise to be kind.”

“Are you threatening me Hiruzen?” The accusation feels like a poisoned blade. However, he does not let it consume him. Hiruzen accepted his duty when he took this hat. He knows what is at stake if he allows Danzo to continue to do as he wishes.

“If you feel threatened, that's on you. I am merely reminding you of the facts Danzo.” He states, no room for questions. These are just the facts after all, no hard feelings. If Danzo pursues his student's students then he would have no choice but to intervene.

“Facts. Of course. Good night Hiruzen.” Danzo turns to leave, Hiruzen clears his throat.

“Good night Danzo, oh and before you go, you do not have permission to take that scroll.”

“My bad.”

“A simple accident, now I need to finish up here and you need to call off some agents. I will not be responsible for Orochimaru if he decides he doesn't like how close they've gotten to his apprentice.” Hiruzen says with a wry smile, Danzo remains impassive as he sets the scroll back on the shelf. He leaves without another word.

Hiruzen turns to his guard. Inari meets his gaze and he walks back to his desk.

“Inari, let Hebi know he has my full permission to put down any member of ROOT he perceives as a threat to his student, himself or Minato.” He knows for fact that Orochimaru has already killed two of Danzo's ROOT, despite how his student tried to hide- Hiruzen knew. At least now Orochimaru wouldn't need to feel guilty.

If Danzo was going to make bad decisions, then he could suffer the consequences of his own actions. Hiruzen knew that Tsuyuko was a potential liability for Orochimaru. That the young jounin cared a good deal more for his student than he wanted others to know, and the lengths he went to conceal his fondness would work for anyone who was him. Hiruzen knew what it looked like when it came to parents and their willingness to protect their children. He thinks of his own son. No, Orochimaru was never going to be able to hide that he had all but legally adopted that little girl as his daughter.

“Sandaime-sama?” Inari's tentative question pulls him from the

thought.

“Danzo isn’t going to back down like I have asked him. Actions have consequences.” Inari nods, accepting the order without further question. Hiruzen takes a seat.

“Understood Sandaime-sama.”

“Inari, you are dismissed. Thank you for staying late with me tonight.”

“You are not leaving though.” He can only chuckle. No he wasn’t, despite thinking he didn’t need to be here this late. They were at the end of war and he had work to do.

“Neko is coming in, I will be alright for a few minutes by myself. I’m sure your husband misses you. Go home, you deserve a break.”

“I... Understood Sandaime-sama. Thank you. Goodnight sir.”

“Goodnight Inari.”

Jiraiya regrets agreeing to oversee both Minato’s and Tsuyuko’s training that morning. Orochimaru was needed in his lab without his apprentice due to some highly dangerous substance and did not want Tsuyuko anywhere near it. Which, fair, Jiraiya wouldn’t want the brat anywhere near it either, especially with her weird fascination with potent toxins. Usually on days like this Tsuyuko would be sent for more of her iryoninjutsu studies with Tsunade, but Tsunade was busy at the hospital and could not spare any time for the kid today. So he was stuck with the brat.

Everything was going well until the kids decided that they were going to test theory and then he suddenly hauling two kids out of the river. Neither of which even seem repentant. Jiraiya doesn’t know who he wants to be angry with, dumb ten year old prodigies or Hiruzen-sensei for giving them access to the Nidaime’s scrolls. He rubs his face, biting back the fear fueled anger.

Did they not realize how dangerous that could have been?

“Oh, Jiraiya-san is upset.” Tsuyuko tugs at Minato’s water soaked sleeve, pointing at him and Jiraiya pins the brat with a dirty look. Of course he’s mad, they pulled a dangerous stunt and don’t even seem to

care or realize how wrong that could have gone.

“Sensei?” Minato looks at him with a wide eyed expression, Jiraiya sighs. He takes another deep breath.

Yelling at them would get him nowhere.

“You... neither of you have enough chakra for shit like that? Do you want to die because you deplete your chakra trying crazy ninjutsu without supervision?” He crosses his arms, glaring at them both, hoping that one of them gets it through their thick skull to think through the consequences before trying shit next time.

“But you’re here.” Tsuyuko gripes, sounding absolutely dumbfounded. He levels an unimpressed look.

For someone with a supposed adult’s memories, surely she wasn’t serious. But looking at her expression, the child is one hundred percent serious. He huffs.

“Neither of you cleared what you were planning with me.”

“Sensei doesn’t require that from me.” Tsuyuko argues back, and Jiraiya mentally makes a note to lecture his teammate later. Of course Orochimaru didn’t require Tsuyuko not to tell him what she was going to do.

He probably already knew, stupid fucking genius that he was. But that wasn’t the case for every jounin, and these two needed to tell him what they were doing. It wasn’t safe, Jiraiya is not Orochimaru, he cannot read either of the kids' minds. While he’s smart, he’s not really equipped to deal with prodigies.

“Well he should. Tsuyuko-chan, I shouldn’t have to tell you how dangerous attempting things like this are at your age?” He lectures, and the little girl shrugs at him. Minato remains quiet and contemplative at her side. Jiraiya’s student at least looks like he’s actively considering what is being said.

Minato looks like he understands how bad this could have turned out. Jiraiya was going to have to talk to him about following Tsuyuko blindly into things. It would do neither of them any good. They needed to know their limits, and actively keep each other accountable. Until they had teammates of their own, the two had to act like a team.

Tsuyuko huffs, like she doesn’t agree with his assessment in the

slightest and that she's about to blow a fuse to fight him over it. Jiraiya watches as the girl stands dusting off her training pants. She paces.

"Why? It's not like we're running active missions, we can afford to deal with chakra exhaustion in the safety of the village." She counters. It would be a good argument, if they were older, if they actually knew their limits. But as it stood the two were still kids. Kids who were still learning.

Kids who were apparently convinced to push limits they didn't fully comprehend. Jiraiya gets the feeling the two of them together are only going to get worse as they get older.

"Can you? And do you know yours and Minato's exact limits before chakra exhaustion turns to collapse and death?" He challenges and is met with a petulant scowl. Minato tugs at Tsuyuko's sleeve to get her to back down, she at least doesn't start pacing.

"No, but we listen to our bodies, why are you so mad? What we're doing isn't dangerous." The innocence of genin, all aspects of training had potential to be dangerous.

Testing new techniques no matter how much theory you knew was dangerous. Jiraiya crouches to be level with them- he hadn't meant to talk down to them, and getting on Tsuyuko's level always seemed to work for Orochimaru. He reaches out, making sure his sleeves roll up to reveal a marring of old scars, Jiraiya sets his hands on their heads.

"Neither of you have been taught how to body flicker yet, if you do it incorrectly you can splice yourself." He tells them seriously, he needs them to understand why they can't do things like this in the future.

Jiraiya doesn't want them to inadvertently hurt themselves.

"Sarutobi-sama taught us while you were away. Sensei we know the rules and what not to do, we've been safe about this. I promise." Minato pipes up and it nearly kills all of Jiraiya's resolve to scold them.

Fuck Orochimaru was right, he was soft on Minato.

"Minato-kun.."

"We only ended up in the river because you freaked out." Tsuyuko mutters, crossing her arms. Jiraiya realizes then that he's going to get

nowhere with this stubborn ass child. Fine, but it wouldn't spare her from him telling Orochimaru.

Because if anyone would get through to the genin it would be her own teacher.

"You know what, whatever, walk me through what the two of you are trying to achieve?"

"Body flicker and replacement jutsu with each other. According to the Nidaime's scrolls, it's a good way to start preparing the body for techniques like the hiraishin." Minato pipes up, eyes light up with excitement. Tsuyuko grins at his enthusiasm.

"It's a good theory, testing it out here where there is the most open space was the safest bet." Tsuyuko informs, and he raises a brow at her.

"You have no interest in that."

"I don't but Minato does, so I don't mind helping him get the hang of it. Since we're similar in size it's better than him trying with say you or someone else." he can't deny that's a fair point.

"Fine. But neither of you are allowed to practice this kind of stuff without me or Orochimaru around. It's dangerous. Do you both understand that?" Minato nods, Jiraiya counts it as a half success because of course Tsuyuko scoffs.

"Pfft, no more dangerous than sending us off to the front lines."

"Neither of you will see front lines in this war." He is quick to shoot that down, this war would be over within a fortnight or so. Minato and Tsuyuko would not see the front lines now.

"But we will in the next." Tsuyuko whispers. Jiraiya's thoughts come to a sudden dark halt at that. The stark reminder that he knows now what Tsuyuko knows. Another war is on the horizon, one they probably weren't going to be able to do anything about. The reality is harsh and he hates it so much.

There is nothing he can do to save them from that. They are going to see front lines whether he likes it or not. Jiraiya shakes his head.

"There's no winning with you in there kid." He manages with a dry smile, an attempt to lighten the subject because he doesn't want to



think about the next war while this one is still going on. Tsuyuko grins but it's not triumphant, it's sad.

"Of course not, I'm right. You are here supervising even if you don't know the full scope, and we will at some point see the front lines. If Minato or I get hurt while training I can heal us." She informs him carefully. Minato continues to stay quiet, after this is all over he's dumping Tsuyuko back on Orochimaru and taking Minato out for dinner.

"I don't approve." Tsuyuko of course just shrugs at him again.

"I wasn't seeking your approval Jiriaya-san."

"You're as stubborn as Orochimaru, you know that brat." He tells her and she fucking beams. What a brat.

"Thank you."

"Tsuyuko I don't think sensei means that as a compliment." Minato mumbles and she glances at him over her shoulder and rolls her eyes. She's taking it as a compliment, even though Jiraiya definitely did not intend it as one.

Orochimaru is a right bastard at times, that's nothing to be proud of.

"I don't care." Of course she doesn't. Minato opens his mouth like he wants to challenge that particular statement and Jiriaya has no patience to listen to them bicker right now.

"I'm not going to listen to you two argue. Minato, walk me through your thought process."

"Hai sensei."

Orochimaru is in his lab when Inari arrives. He barely glances up at the masked agent, who waits patiently for him to finish his current experiment. He's still some ways off from being done but Inari is nice enough and they were protective of Minato and Tsuyuko from what he could tell so he pauses to regard them.

"Inari?"

"Lord Third requests your presence at the tower." They inform in

monotone. Ah a summons for him then, how boring. He continues his work, Inari remains unbothered.

“Did he perhaps give an itinerary- I am in the middle of something.”

“He said it wasn’t urgent but it would interest you.” Interest him, whatever did sensei need to talk to him about that would hold interest to him. There is nothing that immediately comes to mind.

“He did? Hmm, It will be a few minutes until I can wrap this up.” Inari nods taking the response as it was.

“Of course, I will alert him. Oh, and Hebi.” Inari hedges, a strange tone slipping past the monotone. Something has happened within the time he was gone that can not be left unattended. Orochimaru is willing to barter that a certain someone just made a grave mistake.

“Hmmm?”

“The Sandaime has given your mask explicit permission to take down any member of ROOT you perceive to be a threat to you, or the children.” That catches his attention enough that he sets the vile back down. It’s not pressing, it can wait. This development on the other hand seems to need his immediate attention.

Well then.

Looks like he has a summons to get to.

Chapter End Notes

in which things are happening, thank you for reading <3

# Dangerous and good can go hand in hand, anger and fear can wear the same face..

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Orochimaru is still reeling hours later from his conversation with sensei. It was enlightening. He is a bit stunned, although that may be by how utterly horribly cold it is currently. That is made no better by icicle feet digging into his thigh by the half awake child sitting in his lap at the table. He considers his student for a moment, debating whether or not he needed to warn her that in the coming days she would be getting official squadmates.

He doesn't think she'll react horribly, Tsuyuko seemed to like all of the others in her generation. Orochimaru considers how her head keeps dropping and her eyes flutter close to snap open as she fights sleep. Now is perhaps not the time for the conversation of teammates.

Or the time to discuss what Jiraiya had to say about his teaching habits, and how stubborn Tsuyuko apparently was. Orochimaru had not been super impressed by the whole thing, mainly because it was no secret that Tsuyuko was stubborn. Headstrong Tsunade would say, but that was more sugar coating that had no place in the descriptor of his student.

Orochimaru hopes she gets along with Nawaki and the Hyuga boy.

"She looks so sweet when she sleeps, it's hard to believe she spent the morning giving Jiraiya lip." Tsunade sits across from him, he raises a brow. Whatever was she doing here? And why did she just let herself in. He could have maimed her.

*Except she flared her chakra when she arrived so he wasn't actually startled, and thus there was no real reason for maiming at this time.*

He was enjoying the quiet night without Jiraiya and Minato. Orochimaru sometimes missed the days before both joined them in the estate. Things were far less lively, but no less warm. As much as he reluctantly enjoyed Jiraiya's company, he was often loud and Orochimaru missed the quiet. Tsunade being here certainly threw a

paper bomb into his plans for down time. Oh well, she was here now and if he sent her away when she so obviously wanted to discuss something with him he'd never hear the end of it.

"Yes, apparently sensei taught her and Minato how to body flicker and they were taking the steps to start learning the fundamentals of the hiraishin." He shifts to reach for his coffee, Tsuyuko doesn't stir in his lap for that he is grateful. Orochimaru isn't convinced she's sleeping any better, he did not want to risk waking her.

It was really looking like he was going to have to prescribe something for the child. How he loathed to do so, but as the issue still wasn't settling naturally- he couldn't just let it sit.

"Explains how angry Jiraiya seemed." Tsunade replies easily, Orochimaru nods. Jiraiya was not happy when Orochimaru finally returned home post his meeting with sensei. Tsuyuko was nowhere to be seen in the common area of the estate so he could gauge the two must have had some kind of spat.

Jiraiya spent twenty minutes ranting at him until he left suddenly with Minato for dinner. Orochimaru at that point went to check on his student. Tsuyuko had placed a privacy seal, one of the noise canceling ones he gave her in hope it would help her sleep on her door so she could ignore Jiraiya as she worked on some new substance theory. He'd been careful to approach her about the subject, and Tsuyuko's story matched Jiraiya's well enough even if it was her perspective of the events.

Of course it was hard to bring up Jiraiya's points when he knew his student was being careful. Orochimaru trusted Tsuyuko to know her limits with things like this, never before had she pushed herself beyond what was reasonable. He regards Tsunade carefully and sighs, setting his mug down as to absently pet Tsuyuko's fluffy hair.

"He was apparently not impressed that neither cleared it with him beforehand." Tsunade's brows furrow, she takes a moment to respond then.

"I can see why that would be concerning." It would be concerning if Minato and Tsuyuko were normal genin. But they were not. They were prodigious genin which mean different rules applied.

"Yes, I don't require that from Tsuyuko normally, and she's very good about telling me her plans if she thinks they're dangerous. Neither her nor Minato seemed to think this was dangerous." Nor did he, but

Tsunade makes a face that tells him she obviously disagrees with that assessment. Great, now he was going to have to hear it from both her and Jiraiya.

He cares for his teammates, he thinks they are incredibly talented and good at what they do- but they are so incredibly dense sometimes that he cannot deal with them.

“I mean...” She trails off seeming to realize that this wasn’t an argument they needed to have right then. Orochimaru sighs.

“If sensei taught them body-flicker they were more than prepared. But, I can understand Jiraiya’s ire. It’s personal for him.” He throws a bone, it’s easier than arguing for which he does not currently have the energy. Jiraiya would be somewhat more nervous about the genin utilizing things like body flicker because of his own accident in their youth.

But that was Jiraiya, who was not as self aware as their students. He needed to treat them like individuals versus shadows of himself.

Tsunade hums, she props her elbow on the table and leans over it. He really wished she wouldn’t do that, it was terrible posture. Orochimaru would hate for Tsuyuko to pick up Tsunade’s horrid habits.

“That it is. Nawaki is taking the graduation exam this month. He’ll pass.” Tsunade informs him as if he had not been paying attention to Nawaki’s status at the academy. He has been for months now.

“I am aware. I have not forgotten our bargain.”

“I know, but things are different now, so if.. I’m not holding you to that old bet.” Tsunade offers him an out, but Orochimaru shakes his head. He thinks of a story told, of a child gone before their time. He thinks that maybe Nawaki would be safer if he wasn’t his student, but if fate is going to try and right itself then he trusts himself alone to keep Tsunade’s little brother alive.

“I’m not going back on my word Tsunade. Teammates will be good for her.” Besides he knows Jiraiya plans to push the agenda with Minato to keep him as a single student for a while longer, it wouldn’t hurt Minato who doesn’t need to learn teamwork quite like his independent thinker. Minato was easy going and got along well with almost every kid in his generation, and while the same could be said about Tsuyuko she only worked well with Minato and sometimes

Sakumo's students.

She certainly didn't do well around the louder kids and that was something that needed to be addressed now. So while he wants Tsuyuko to like her future teammates, wants this entire transition period to go well, no matter what she has to have them. He cannot take shortcuts, and not take on Nawaki and the Hyuga boy because doing so will set her back. Realistically Nawaki could go to another jounin, and he'd be just fine no matter- but he thinks this arrangement will work out well for all three genin. At least based on his current observations of the pre-teens in question.

As much as Tsuyuko needed teammates, needed to learn to work together. Nawaki and Hyuga Himura needed someone to teach them to trust others. They were going to need each other.

"They will. If she's willing, she doesn't always work well with others." Tsunade agrees with him on this. Orochimaru nods.

"I know, I hope she will see the logic of the decision." And that logical reasoning will outweigh any dramatic reaction. He just hopes they all realize how desperately they are going to need each other to survive the coming war. Tsunade hums.

"What did sensei want from you?" She asks as she gets up from the table, most likely to pillage through the cupboards for a snack. It seems they will be here for a while. Orochimaru decides if that's the case then he should take Tsuyuko to her room.

"One moment." He tells her before standing not missing the nod she gives as he carries his student out of the dining room.

Tsuyuko clings to him and it takes a bit of prying to put her in her bed for the night. Orochimaru rolls his eyes, stubborn child even in sleep. He drapes a few extra blankets on her with the thought that if she is warm, she will not wake up in a few hours complaining of cold. Afterwards he returns to the dining room. Tsunade has grabbed a few snacks as well as some tea. If that is the case then he thinks another cup of coffee is in order.

"How do you know I met with sensei?" He questions once he resumes his seat. Tsunade sips her tea before answering the question.

"Hatake Suyuri came in today with the baby, we talked." That would do it then. Hatake Suyuri was also ANBU operative Inari. Inari who has been one of sensei's favorite guards for the last five years or so.

The Hatake matron when they weren't acting as one of ANBU high ups was a beloved member of society, recently giving birth to her first child- Hatake Kakashi. Whom Orochimaru was already familiar with as a result of Tsuyuko's memories. The poor baby would not have a good life if nothing changed within the next three years.

Orochimaru needed to figure out how to not let Sakumo be the 'cause' of the next war. It was not going to be productive for his ability to control the narrative of the third war to try and end it before it has a chance to be a nuisance. While no way to avoid with how fragile the political standings are at the moment, if he could fast run the next war that would be more than ideal.

As such, Hatake Sakumo could not be the cause.

"Ahh Inari, how is the baby?"

"Doing better, he's gaining good weight. Suyu has apparently been loving their time on guard duty while sensei looked after Tsuyuko and Minato. Asked me to pass on some observations to you." Of course Suyuri would. Inari took their job very seriously, but when the mask was off they were still someone who cared deeply. So they wouldn't let injustice sit if they could help.

A bit like a certain someone he knows.

"That is perhaps a breach of contract." He muses knowing good and well that it hardly mattered to Hatake Suyuri. Sensei trusted Inari to do much of his bidding, they were his personal messenger, and his favorite guard. It was likely that whatever message Inari wanted to pass along, they'd already received sensei's approval to do so.

"Perhaps, but they said the information wasn't confidential and sensei gave his approval for them to do so." Tsunade confirms his suspicion. Orochimaru enjoys being right.

"They could have told me this morning." Although if he were being honest he was more prickly than usual this morning, he almost has his current project figured out. He's still missing something and to be so close.

It's vexing.

"Suyuri said you were rather prickly this morning, and they weren't getting involved with that."

“Reasonable I suppose. Tell me what they wanted to pass along.”

“Tell me how your meeting went with sensei, what did he want?”  
Tsunade challenges and he smirks.

“He offered me the hat.” Tsunade sets her cup down to stare at him. It takes her a moment to respond.

“Really? What did you say?” She demands, but instead he shakes his head. Two could play this game. He wants answers. Hatake Suyuri is a loyal shinobi to the village, to the Hokage. So if they’ve gone through the steps to pass along a message to him, well he was willing to listen.

“Quid pro quo Tsunade.” Orochimaru counters, teases really, Tsunade snorts.

“Inari observed seven to eight ROOT agents watching the kids during the day, two followed them home.” Tsunade waits to tell him once his coffee cup is back on the table. Orochimaru contemplate the numbers, they aren’t more than what he’d been expecting- he is not a fan of the fact that two followed the children home while they were gone.

If he figured out who they were he’d more than likely... well they wouldn’t be his problem anymore that’s for certain.

Orochimaru reaches across the table to take a rice ball. Tsunade seems surprised by his reaction, probably expecting something far more volatile from him in regards to the statement. And while it did enrage him to no end that Danzo would be so bold- there wasn’t anything he could do about what happens when he is not in the village. Sans taking Tsuyuko on every mission with him for the foreseeable future, but that seems like an overreaction and dangerous. No that would not be wise, Orochimaru sighs.

“That tracks to the numbers Tsuyuko continues to point out.” He tells Tsunade. She swirls her tea.

“About that, how?” Tsunade asks, as if she’d just remembered their previous conversation. Orochimaru places a quick privacy seal on the table, no need to share this information with anyone trying to listen in. He grins, a mix of feral pride for how very clever his student is. How dangerous she was going to become.

“She poisoned them.” He does not wait for Tsunade to set her tea back down, and the old ceramic shatters under her strength. She doesn’t



even look apologetic for breaking his cup.

“Excuse me?”

“Whenever she notices them her bombs laced with tracking elements ‘accidentally’ explode. They get caught in the downward stream of the bomb, breathing in the trackers and it registers on a special type of chakra paper. It’s a rather complex system.” He explains as that familiar pang of pride wrapping around him as it was the first time Tsuyuko broached the subject with him.

She was clever. Her experience in the field is undeniable. Tsuyuko is going to be a menace by the time she reaches jounin and he is looking forward to every part of her progress.

“That... that sounds like the work of a jounin poisons master. A Suna level poison master.” Tsunade manages after a moment of comprehending the full explanation.

Orochimaru smiles.

“Delightful isn’t it.”

“Orochimaru, she’s nine, and the level of this..” Tsunade trails off, he can see her fear clear on her face. He nods. Because he understands what something like this implies. Tsuyuko is going to be dangerous.

And that is a scary concept to a lot of people.

“It’s going to get so much better.” Orochimaru settled on. He knows that not only is she going to be dangerous, she’s going to be strong and so inherently good. Better than he ever could be. She’s not like them, she cares more than the average shinobi ever allows themselves too. So while she will be a threat, she will also become a salvation to so many. Tsuyuko was going to become someone who fought for others, as much as herself, she wouldn’t let those she loved be harmed.

Tsunade considers, she sighs, and begins to pick up the pieces of broken ceramic. Cleaning the spilt tea off the wooden table.

“I want her in the rotations tomorrow. To make sure she understands the lasting impact of her poisons. Even if tracker poisons aren’t harmful, if she’s continuously dousing the same agents.” Tsunade says with a finality that he won’t ignore. He will allow her this request.

“They could suffer horrid lung damage. She is aware, but I consent to rotations. I’m caught up with something somewhat important, and think it’s best not to stress Jiraiya with Tsuyuko’s antics.” While Tsuyuko knew her poisons better than one would expect - why else did they discuss them so often, a reminder was still helpful.

Although he hardly cares about the long term health of the agents watching his child. But, he doesn’t think he should say that outloud.

Besides, Jiraiya was not quite equipped to deal with Tsuyuko it seemed and he’d rather not foster a bad relationship between the two for the future. Or put strain on Jiraiya’s relationship with his own student. Minato was Tsuyuko’s closest friend, and Orochimaru knew that the boy would ignore Jiraiya in favor of listening to Tsuyuko.

Honestly those two probably needed to be separated for a while. They worked well together, but they also fed off each other at the worst times. Yes, some separation would do them both some good.

“He didn’t believe me.” Tsunade returns to the table, with more snacks and another glass of tea. Orochimaru eats another rice ball.

“That is his own problem.” Really he never thought Jiraiya of all people would be a skeptic but here they were. If it was going to be any of them, it would have been himself. Instead, the roles were reversed. Tsunade hums.

“Yes, alright you’ve stalled enough, I demand you tell me about your conversation with sensei.”

“Very well.”

Minato sits with Inoichi as they wait for the other two to finish their cool down exercises. Jiraiya-sensei is off talking quietly with Sakumo-san, so it’s really just the four of them left to their own devices.

“How’s training going? Jiraiya-san seemed odd today..” Inoichi questions after another long bout of silence passed them. Minato thinks about how best to answer that question. He shrugs.

“Sensei is upset with me right now, it’s been a bit weird.” He admits, can’t think of a single reason why the truth wouldn’t be the right answer really.

“Oh? Why? I can’t think of anything you of all people would do to upset someone like Jiraiya.” Inoichi remarks, Minato sighs. It was more a joint effort, Jiraiya-sensei was also still upset with Tsuyuko.

“Are Minato and his sensei fighting?” Choza asks as he and Shikaku walk over.

“Sorta, I guess, I don’t really know.” It was confusing and he still didn’t understand what they did wrong.

“Explain it to us, maybe we can help.” Shikaku grumbles plopping down next to him. Minato is hardly surprised when the older genin lays down with his arms folded under his head. He glances over to Inoichi who nods.

Guess he was telling them his current plans. Without it, he didn’t think the situation would make complete sense. Minato trusted them, so it wouldn’t hurt to tell them.

“I’m going to learn how to use the Nidaime’s Hiraishin.”

“Of course you would, sounds troublesome.” Shikaku grumbles despite how he opens one eye in intrigue. Minato grins. While learning the hiraishin was going to be troublesome, everything so far had been worth it. He’s not afraid to put in the work, and if all goes according to plan he should be able to use the technique by the time he turns fifteen.

Once he could use the Nidaime’s version then he could begin to modify it to fit his fighting style, and integrate it with that. It was such an exciting prospect, imagine being able to fight like that essentially being a one man army at that speed. He’d be able to help so many people. It would be incredible... if he can achieve it.

“It’s been going okay so far, it’s a lot of reading seal theory.” He tells them. So much reading, and Minato likes reading seal theory but this is a lot.

“You always liked seal theory.” Choza points out, Minato nods. He loves seal theory. It’s a shame Tsuyuko finds it boring, it would be nice to talk about it with her in detail, but she was only interested in learning the bits that actually would help him with his current goal.

“It’s just so fascinating, the possibilities are endless.” He rambles, trying to not get over excited. Really Minato loves seal theory so much. Again endless possibilities, ability to help so many people. It’s

just so cool.

“Yea, yea, how does this relate to whatever is going on between you and Jiraiya-san?” Inoichi interjects stopping a full on tangent before it can begin. Minato isn’t offended, he knows how he gets.

“While sensei was gone Sarutobi-sama taught Tsuyuko and I how to body flicker, its one of the beginning steps to figuring out the base of the hiraishin. We were practicing it in tandem with body replacement, essentially instead of replacing ourselves with blocks of wood it was each other.”

“Sounds like something the two of you would do.” Shikaku grumbles, not unkindly and Minato continues.

“It was fine until we started applying flicker to it. Sensei saw and got mad that we hadn’t informed him.”

“Yea that would do it. Most jounin sensei want to know what your plans are so they can help.” Inoichi tells him, Minato bites his lip. That may be the case with three man teams, independent students and apprenticeships were a bit different. At least based on his and Tsuyuko’s.

“I mean I guess, that’s never been how it’s been before though.” Jiraiya-sensei has never asked him point blank what he’s going to do when they aren’t working on whatever lesson plan Jiraiya-sensei used. Usually Minato gave a quick run down, base level but it wasn’t a requirement.

Or it hadn’t been before now.

“Body flicker technique is complex, it can be dangerous if used improperly so if he didn’t know you knew how to do it that could be why he’s upset. You and Tsuyuko probably scared him.” Inoichi continues. Minato considers, he thinks back to the other day, he considers how sensei had looked when he was lecturing them.

He realizes then, that what he’d seen was not anger- but fear.

“Why didn’t he just say that instead?”

“Jounin don’t like to admit when they’re afraid, kid.” Minato looks up to find Sakumo-san has joined them, without sensei.

“Why?” Everyone gets afraid sometimes, it didn’t do anyone any good

to pretend that wasn't the case.

"I think that question depends on the jounin. Jiraiya had to step away, you four look to be done with your cool down exercises so training is dismissed. Unless someone has questions, you all are done for today." Sakumo-san doesn't flicker away immediately, but no one has questions. Minato thanks him for his time.

"Thank you for taking it seriously. Have a good day kids." He leaves them. Minato doesn't know what he's going to do for the rest of the day. Tsuyuko was more than likely still doing rotations at the hospital so she wouldn't be available until later.

"Wanna go get ramen?" He asks, no desire to go home just yet.

"Sure. New place just opened up close to the academy, it looks good." Sounds good to him.

Minato has a lot to think about it seems. He thinks that he probably should apologize to sensei. It hadn't been his intention to scare Jiraiya.

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the love on the last chapter! I hope you all enjoy this one just as much!! Thank you so much for reading <3

# A day in the life, calm before..

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

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The hospital wing is finally quiet. Rounds are long over. Tsunade is busy with a few things in her small office. She'd be getting more done if there wasn't a genin curled up in her lap asleep. Tsuyuko had been reorganizing one of the desk drawers until she fell asleep, dozing off without any warning.

"I thought you went home." In the door of her office stands none other than Dan. He smiles easily, Tsunade knows that things between them are still tense. But they are getting better and she doesn't want to chance it just yet.

"Had a few things to sort. Besides, I'm waiting on Oro to pick his brat." She gestures loosely to the genin that may or may not be drooling. Dan bites his lip as his brow raises.

"Is she asleep?" He whispers, which Tsunade thinks is nice. Especially since Tsuyuko is convinced she needs to fight the other medic on any occurrence available to her regardless of reason.

Tsunade is going to have to ask Orochimaru why his apprentice doesn't like Dan. Sans the petty reason the nine year old had given a while ago, which frankly could be enough of a reason for the little girl. But Tsunade also didn't buy it. She reaches for her tea that has long since gone cold.

"Yes, so be quiet and don't wake her." Dan nods, he shuts the door softly behind him walking over to the desk.

"She's a bit of an odd one.. I never pegged Orochimaru for being a teacher." Dan rubs the back of his head, it's easy going, probably not as ill intended as she takes it. Tsunade's instant reaction is not nice, she narrows her eyes and pins the younger man with a dark look.

Orochimaru was a good teacher. He cared more than most realized, and he was good for Tsuyuko.

“Don’t speak ill of my teammate Dan.” It’s the only warning she’s going to give him on the matter.

“I’m not, sorry, I didn’t mean it that way. It just was, surprising is all.” He apologizes, sheepish, genuine. Tsunade sighs. Tsuyuko burrows her face further into Tsunade’s shoulder, maybe she needed to go easier on the genin’s lessons.

That or ask Orochimaru what Tsuyuko’s sleep patterns have been like recently. She makes a mental note to order a sleep test, as much as she knew Orochimaru wanted to wait- before team placement depends outside of the village missions as a normal occurrence they needed to figure out how to combat the apparent sleep issues Tsuyuko already has. Before they get worse due to active shinobi life.

“You know he’s set to be my brother’s sensei in a few weeks time right?” She tells Dan, who to his credit doesn’t laugh even though he does look like he might.

“Oh poor Nawaki-kun, that one is going to eat him alive.” She only hums non-committedly at that particular statement.

When she asked her younger brother what he thought about Tsuyuko, his answer hadn’t been too far from what she knew about the kid. Nawaki had always gotten on well with others his age, much like Minato-kun, who was very charismatic. Her younger brother never met someone he didn’t like, and while he’d been hopeful in his account of what he thought about Tsuyuko- it was clear he even when they’d shared a classroom hadn’t thought her to be approachable.

“I bet we’re all going to be surprised.” Tsunade thinks this will go one of two ways. Contrary to what Orochimaru hopes will happen, Tsunade thinks that this transition won’t be as calm as one would think.

She hopes for the sake of the genin it will all work out, but if Tsunade were honest, she’s apprehensive about the placement. She has no idea how Tsuyuko will handle having teammates. No idea how Orochimaru will handle having a trio of genin to look after.

“Maybe so... do, would you like to get dinner with me?” Tsunade nearly drops her tea cup. Instead she stops what she had been doing to actually look at her fellow medic.

“Tonight?” Because if she’d remembered their itinerary for the week, tonight is the only option. He rubs the back of his neck, nervous

energy too much to hide.

“Whenever really, I think we started on the wrong foot. I want to apologize.”

“You can do that without us getting dinner.” Despite how much dinner out with him could be interesting, if it's just for an apology then it's not worth wasting her only night off this week on.

“I know, but I want to get dinner with you.” Dan's sincerity is something else. Tsunade adjusts Tsuyuko in her arms, the little girl doesn't even stir.

Hopefully Orochimaru would arrive soon to pick his student up. With how things are with Shimura, he'd been hesitant to let Tsuyuko wander around the village unattended. Perhaps a bit extreme, but considering the circumstances and what kind of asset the genin would become in the next half decade... they did not want someone like Shimura getting his hands on her. Tsunade wouldn't put it past the old hawk to try to kidnap Tsuyuko. If he thought she would be beneficial to him...

So no, she doesn't begrudge Orochimaru for his caution. Hell she'd be cautious too. Tsuyuko's knowledge of the future aside, the girl's medical experience and aptitude for poisons and medicine making was something to be feared. She would be a good medic, but she was going to be a great poison master one day. While she may never rival Tsunade's own strength she would be strong in other ways, ways that were arguably more dangerous in the long term.

Konaha hasn't had a poison master in years, having one now would be the difference between life or death in the coming years and future wars. Tsunade sighs.

“Alright, tonight is probably the best option though. The coming week is going to be busy with academy evals and chunin corp physicals.” Dan nods, he's more than alright with dinner tonight, if anything that's preferable. No anticipation or waiting to kill his resolve.

“Why did we set those things up to be in the same week? Sage it's going to be a long week. Is Tsuyuko-chan going to be here everyday?” Tsunade snickers, at the complaint, she too knows it's going to be a long week.

“Because they have to be done, and we have a few extra hands right



now as deployment is not the issue it was. Probably, actually tomorrow she may need to be on your rotation. Is that going to be a problem for you?" He scoffs at the question, considering the sleeping child in Tsunade's arms.

"I'm not going to fight with a nine year old."

"I didn't think you would, but she may try to fight you." Tsunade warns, and he grimaces. Accepting the rotation list Tsunade hands him to review, as the second highest ranking medic in the hospital it was his responsibility to make sure things like training rotations . That... unfortunately seemed right. He really wasn't sure what he did either.

"Great, why doesn't she like me again?"

"You treat her like a child." Tsunade informs, leaning back in her chair.

"She is a child." Dan counters and she scoffs.

Maybe in another life Tsuyuko and the others in her generation could have been considered children. If things had been different, if war wasn't what it was. But here and now they were shinobi, just like the rest of them.

"No, she's a genin. One that is a prodigy, and the apprentice of a sannin. Treating her like a child just makes you look stupid."

"I know all of that..."

"Then what's the problem?" Tsunade stands, Tsuyuko doesn't stir. She walks over to Dan, he meets her hard gaze straight on.

"It's not fair to her and the kids like her to have their childhood stripped from them." A sentiment she certainly agreed on.

But war waits for no one, and while the second war may be official at the end. Tsunade knew better. Peace wasn't a guarantee. It isn't forever. The office door opens, she steps away from Dan to meet Orochimaru. About time.

"In the future we can strive for better for the next generations. Longer academy time. Do away with wartime early graduation. Until then, we need to treat the genin we have with the respect they deserve." He adds to the conversation, not telling how long he'd been listening.

Tsunade doesn't startle when Orochimaru appears suddenly next to her. He's quick to take his sleeping apprentice from her.

"Orochimaru you're late." She gripes, Orochimaru rolls his eyes. On another note, Tsuyuko even being moved around does not stir. Rather impressive.

She must have been really out of it after today. Maybe tomorrow she needed a rest day instead of rotation.

"I never told you when I would arrive. Did you drug her?"  
Orochimaru questions, Dan snorts. Tsunade rolls her eyes at him, snatching the rotation roster out of Dan's hands to remove Tsuyuko's name. She can still come to the hospital tomorrow, but it will be for book study and not clinical.

"Not this time. Busy day." If Dan is shocked that she would drug Tsuyuko, that is not her problem. Orochimaru rolls his eyes.

"Hmm.. have fun on your date, don't do anything Jiraiya would."

"I will kick you." She looks up from over the roster to glare at him. Orochimaru of course, like the bastard he is, smirks.

"We shall see. I'll be taking Tsuyuko with me to the lab tomorrow."

"Alright, goodnight Orochimaru."

"Goodnight Tsunade, have a nice evening. Dan." Then before either of them can say anything to that he is gone in a small chime of bells. Tsunade shakes her head, what a jerk.

"So, dinner?"

"Dinner." Dan smiles.

Tsuyuko doesn't stir until they are to the market. Orochimaru would have gone straight home but as he'd been busy no one had bought groceries this week, thus here they were. His apprentice barely lifts her head off his shoulder as she grumbles and flops her head back into his shoulder. It was very unlikely she'd be lively during this trip, chuckling he carries her over to the stand they get most of their produce from. Having sent an order request earlier in the day this is

just a simple pick up and shouldn't take long. They are instantly greeted by the middle aged civilian who runs the stand.

"Oh, poor little dear. All that shinobi training must be hard work."

"Indeed." If she were this tired today, a rest day of sorts in the lab would be beneficial. Orochimaru points at a few extra items he would like added to their bag. He doesn't miss the sound of approaching steps.

"Ubani-obaasan do you have any eggplants?" Orochimaru turns to find Hatake Suyuri walking over. He notes that she has her son with her, the infant is secured in a sling being worn close to his mother's chest. Suyuri offers him a quick, kind smile. Laughing a bit to herself at the sight of Tsuyuko, he assumes.

"Looks like someone had a long day, rotations at the hospital must have run longer today." She grabs a few oranges for her basket, as well as noting the eggplants that are just at the right stage of ripening.

"It's academy medical evals, graduation is coming soon." He doesn't have to share, but he suppose it doesn't hurt either.

"Again already? That seems so soon from the last round." Orochimaru thinks that the Hatake matron has no clear concept of time. Those last rounds were ages ago.

"The last round was over six months ago." He informs, as Tsuyuko turns her head and wild curls prick against his neck and jaw. It was perhaps time for a haircut.

"Ah, hadn't realized that it's been that long." Suyuri shrugs, the gesture is annoyingly familiar and he cannot place from where.

"No I would supposed not. You've had your hands full I hear." He doesn't hold her lack of awareness against her. Orochimaru can understand how being a new parent would warp that little bit of reality.

"Yes, little Kakashi-kun here is certainly trying to give me a heart attack. Coming early as he did. Terrifying." Suyuri laughs, it's not a comfortable or funny thing. He nods. He cannot imagine that being anything other than terrifying.

Tsuyuko suddenly sits up in his arms, she yawns as she zeros in on

Suyuri and the baby. Orochimaru does his best not to laugh at his apprentice as she rubs the sleep out of her eyes.

“Ohhh, a baby.” She coos sleepily.

“Nice of you to wake up.” Tsuyuko blinks slowly at him, yawning once more. She thunks her head back down on his sternum.

“No.” Tsuyuko mumbles sleepily. Suyuri snickers from where she is grabbing a few tomatoes.

“Alright then.” He chuckles.

“Orochimaru-san, your order is ready.”

“Thank you Ubani-san.”

“Have a good evening, Orochimaru.” He returns the sentiment as he takes the bag from the shopkeeper. Orochimaru even offers the Hatake matron a curt nod before stepping out of the stall.

Tsuyuko remains half awake the entire walk home. He does not put her down when they arrive home, which as always makes it harder for him to slip his shoes off but he makes it work. While he could put her down now, he doesn't. It is good practice to work with one hand. So while it takes longer to put things away, he doesn't actually trust that Tsuyuko won't fall over if he puts her down.

Loud intentional steps sound behind him. Orochimaru turns on his heel, eyes narrowed dangerously. Jiraiya holds his hands up in mock surrender. Minato is not with him, which is curious but Orochimaru isn't going to ask.

“Did you drug her?” Jiraiya doesn't miss a single beat to accuse him of drugging his student. Orochimaru scoffs at his teammate.

Despite how often he and Tsunade teased they were willing to and might would. Neither had actually ever had a legitimate reason to. Drugging Tsuyuko while potentially necessary for things like her sleep problem, would not actually benefit her in the long run. Orochimaru is not willing to compromise her health in the long run, instead he knows it is better to take the long way and figure out the root cause and address the issue that way. Then if medication was needed to help, then so be it.

Besides, if Tsuyuko was a good poison master in training then she'd

already be testing everything anyone tried to give her. There would be no surprise drugging happening to his student. She knew better. Was smarter than that.

“No. She was with Tsunade today.” Orochimaru informs Jiraiya, who takes the last items from him and puts them away.

“Did Tsunade drug her?” He scoffs at the question. Jiraiya is the epitome of a dumb genius.

“She said she didn’t.” And he trusted her not to lie about things like that. Jiraiya hums, holding his hands up in a mock surrender. Idiot.

“Fair enough, Tsuyuko-chan are you feeling alright?” Jiraiya gently shoves Tsuyuko’s bangs out of her face. Orochimaru doesn’t stop him. Despite their differences in teaching method, there was no denying that Jiraiya did care about Tsuyuko. Just as he cared about Minato.

The gesture while unnecessary because if Tsuyuko was running a fever he’d feel it and know it is soft and appreciated. Tsuyuko doesn’t answer the question verbally, blinking slowly and sleepily at Jiraiya instead. Orochimaru snorts.

“She’s fine. Long day, so I’m assuming she depleted her chakra more than usual.” His out loud assumption gets a short nod in response. Good, so she just needs to rest. Jiraiya pulls his hand away from her forehead and nods.

Medical ninjutsu took a toll, especially on new and young medics. It is no surprise she is tired. Even if Tsunade had her doing simple diagnostic jutsu or small healing jutsu for minor cuts and scrapes. Doing those things all day would run anyone down. As they were both aware from watching Tsunade go through similar in their early years as a team.

“Oof, fair enough. Minato is out with Sakumo’s brats right now, when he gets back can you tell him tomorrow will be a rest day?” Jiraiya asks as he quickly makes himself a togo mug of tea. Orochimaru shifts his hold on Tsuyuko who’s only protest is to grumble indignantly at being moved.

“I can, is something the matter?” Orochimaru raises a brow. *And if there is- does he require his help*, he doesn’t say but knows Jiraiya will understand.

“No, I have a quick mission. I’ll be back tomorrow evening.” Jiraiya

caps his thermos, and it's then that orochimaru notices that Jiraiya is in his stealth gear. Ah. Nothing that required his help then. He nods.

“Very well. I’ll let him know. He can accompany me and Tsuyuko to the lab tomorrow. I’ll have him work on scripting. For a fuinjutsu master in training his handwriting is subpar.” It’s a biting quip, Jiraiya rolls his eyes.

“That also works. Haha, anyway, I’m heading out.” Jiraiya bids them goodbye. Tsuyuko barely sits up to wave bye, Orochimaru nods.

“Alright Tsuyuko-chan, dinner and then bed.” He tells his apprentice, who burrows against his shoulder and chest. Her eyes flutter shut once more, a simple easy to eat dinner is in order then.

Tsuyuko was not awake enough for anything else. In all reality if food wasn’t going to help her feel better tomorrow then he’d just put her to bed now. But in order to recover more easily from this type of chakra depletion food was a necessity.

“mm-kay *chichi* .” She mumbles, exhaustion winning out against cohenency. Tsuyuko yawns, a hand kneading into the back of his yakata. She’s apparently more out of it that he’d initially guessed. Orochimaru’s grip on his student tightens.

She called him dad.

## Chapter End Notes

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, some soft things before what is probably going to be two chapters or so of mostly hurt and some comfort... heehe

anyway.. thank you for reading!!

<3

# ...must come down.

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~\*~

Tsuyuko is digging her chin into his head, as she stands on the back of his chair to watch what he's doing. Orochimaru makes note of the reaction from the two vials, he's so close to figuring this out. So close that he can taste it, but not there that taste alone leaves him frustrated.

"Sensei?"

"Hmm?"

"Can I try?"

"If you think you have a better idea then go ahead."

"I don't know if it's better.." Tsuyuko mumbles, trailing off, a succession of quick whispers he cannot make due to follow. She hopes down, before climbing on the stool next to him.

Tsuyuko carefully reads through his notes as if she hadn't been doing that the whole time from her perch. Orochimaru appreciates the level of care she shows to his research as much as to her own. On a spare notebook she scrawls down some quick notes, calculations in long form that breaks down every step even further. At this moment, he can see the doctor she used to be. Not the medic she was training to be, or the poison master she would become, no- here and now this is the doctor who died during their life's work.

He watches carefully ready to step in if something goes amiss but he doesn't think it will. If anything, her experience will finally push this to the place of a near conclusion. Before she tries anything, notes are being shoved in his face to review. Orochimaru chuckles, but he takes the notes and carefully goes over the theory and math laid before him.

Oh, well that's an interesting idea.

"Tsuyuko, do you want to try and see what this rework will do?" He most certainly does. Tsuyuko bites her lip.

“It’s not going to be the final piece, but..”

“It will undoubtedly help us get there.” She nods at his assessment, seemingly pleased with herself. He hands her back her notes.

Perhaps he should have had her in the lab much sooner. Orochimaru places his hand on her head, he lets his chakra brush against her, as if to say ‘good job’ and Tsuyuko beams.

In retrospect she should have expected this. It should have been an obvious conclusion of events.. Except, she’d kind of figured her presence would change this. Why would Orochimaru need a team of genin when he has an apprentice? Why does he need more students when he already has her?

She doesn’t want teammates. Doesn’t want to share Orochimaru’s attention with others. A team means missions outside the village, it meant danger and circumstances she couldn’t control.

Oh no.. this was.. *This was going to ruin everything.*

To think the day had started so normal too. Sensei had a breakthrough the day before, they made breakfast together this morning. Jiraiya was back from his recon mission, everything was going alright. But now...

*Now it was all wrong..*

Sensei is talking, he’s going over the basics of their team structure. But she’s not registering a single thing he’s saying. Her ears are ringing. This is going to break them.. This isn’t fair.

Why does she have to share? Tsuyuko doesn’t want to share, she doesn’t want to love more people only to lose them. She doesn’t want to think about what would happen to Orochimaru-sensei if that were to happen. What would happen to her if she loses him.

Tsuyuko’s knees buckle and she stumbles into the back of sensei’s legs. “Tsuyuko-chan?”

Orochimaru rests his hand on her shoulder, steadying her before she can crash into the ground. She won’t meet his gaze.



"I.." Tsuyuko's lip wobbles, she can feel the need to burst into tears arising deep from her chest. No, no... She doesn't want to cry, not right now.

"Tsuyuko-senpai are you okay?" Senju Nawaki's voice breaks through the desperate haze that's taken over. Tsuyuko snaps her head up, eyes narrowed and she glares hard.

"Tsuyuko, that is no way to react to someone asking if you are alright." Orochimaru scolds, Tsuyuko pulls away from him then. She bites the inside of her cheek to stop the vicious snarl that threatens to rise from her throat.

Jealousy rears its head like a fervent monster. She digs her nails into her arms, it feels numb in comparison to how unsteady seas rise in her heart. No one asked her..

No one asked her if she wanted teammates.

Why didn't sensei ask her if she'd be okay with this? He could have warned her. At least if it was inevitable a warning would have helped her mentally prepare for this absolute bullshit. Instead she's been blindsided and now has to deal with a plethora of emotions she doesn't want to deal with and the guilt that comes with knowing she has seen one of her new teammates die. Seen his death break her sensei in a way that he never truly recovered from. How the fuck was she supposed to handle that?

"No." She grumbles terse and sharp. But not elaborating, desperately trying to gain control over her own emotions. The logical, rational, adult portion of her brain reminds her that betrayal is a normal emotion- that given the circumstances it probably didn't even occur to sensei that she would have an issue with having teammates dropped on her.

She's a shinobi of the hidden leaf village. Konoha has always been known for its teams.

But the portion of her brain that is fueled by childhood folly frankly yells a lot louder.

"Are you sick?" Orochimaru all but snaps, he's apparently picked up that something isn't right. She ignores how anger boils in her stomach. Tears slipping down her face as she loses the battle to not cry instead.

"Leave me alone." She mumbles, digging her palms into her eyes to

plug the tears before they betray her even more.

“Excuse you?” Sensei is back in her space, he’s trying to pry her palms from her eyes. Tsuyuko slaps his arm away. She looks up and glares, eyes brimming with tears.

“Leave me alone!” Rage simmers over, Tsuyuko shouts. Sobbing seconds after the echo has rung around the small room. Why is this so hard?

Orochimaru isn’t sure what on earth he is currently witnessing but he does not like it. What on earth has gotten into his student? He hadn’t... Well frankly he doesn’t understand why she is acting like this.

He sighs, trying again to get her to stop hurting herself in the process of what is clearly a meltdown of concerning proportions. Tsuyuko breath hitches in a manner that reminds him far too much of when she’d been hurt in that mission. Orochimaru places both his hands on her shoulders. Letting his chakra brush against hers as if to say take a deep breath.

But she doesn’t, instead there is push back. Resistance that he usually didn’t find from her.

“Tsuyuko, that is enough. You need to calm down.” He commands. It’s not the right way to go about this, he knows. But whatever is going on with his child has now reached a level he doesn’t quite know how to handle.

He can’t help until she tells him what is wrong. In order for that to happen she has to calm, and has to breathe. This was not how he was expecting this meeting to go. His two new students are quiet behind them, he will damage control after he gets Tsuyuko to calm down.

“No... this isn’t fair.” Tsuyuko doesn’t shout, but her words are lost in a garbled sob. Orochimaru’s brows pinch together.

“What isn’t fair?” He keeps his voice level. His tone is neutral despite how his own anger starts to rise. This is not like her, this is not how he expects her to act.

“This! Them!” Tsuyuko stops her foot. Impatience lacing her tongue. Orochimaru’s brow shoots up.

“Your teammates, how on earth isn’t that fair?”

“..I think I understand.” Nawaki mutters from behind them. Which apparently serves to further enrage Tsuyuko. Her eyes snap wide open and anger boils over.

“Sensei is all I have, you both have blood family, you’ll never understand what it’s like to not have that at all. I never knew my parents, I saw my entire village die as a child, sensei is all I have and now I have to share him? That isn’t fair.” Tsuyuko rants, Orochimaru stares.

*Does she truly think that? Is she jealous?*

Orochimaru sees the moment she realizes what she’s said, the moment fear uncases rage, and as if clockwork- his student is gone. He waits a half second before searching for her chakra signature. She seems to have emerged around the Nara compound, which is safe enough and he will let her have some time to calm down. The sannin sighs, he turns to the two boys.

“Apologies.” He stands back up. Nawaki shrugs.

“She’s right, in a way, we can’t understand how it must feel to her to have to now share your attention. Tsuyuko-senpai was never the center of attention in the academy even with her prodigy status, and due to the war the orphanage is always full of kids so it must have been really lonely for her you know. Then she graduated and you became her teacher, just her, for the first time ever she had one person that gave her full attention. I know I’d be jealous if it was the other way around, but I’ve always had neechan’s full attention and our parents when they were still around.” Nawaki seemed unbothered as he talked, but that hadn’t been all that reassuring to him.

He spent a long portion afterwards talking to Nawaki and Himura about the entire ordeal, neither boy was phased which was a relief but still not great. Nawaki had taken the time to reassure him that they kinda figured this might happen. So following giving the two instructions about their meeting times in the future and what he expected, he dismisses them for the day- *they cannot have team training when one part of their new team is missing*- he seeks out his own teammate. Hopefully Tsunade will be able to offer him something.

Of course that does mean retelling how disastrous their first official training session had gone. Tsunade laughs in his face. Luckily it is just the two of them in Tsunade’s small office. Orochimaru sighs, pinching the bridge of his nose to quell the headache that threatens to build. He

waits for Tsunade to stop laughing.

“Nawaki will be fine. Himura-kun too. They have each other.” Tsunade finally stops laughing. Orochimaru rubs his face, that isn’t actually helpful.

“She knows that she will always be my priority, Tsunade, why did she react like that?” He grumbles, even though such a notion is beneath him. But for the life of him cannot figure out what is going through his apprentice’s head.

Tsunade stares at him for a long moment. She shrugs, very similarly to her brother Orochimaru notes, before reaching for her long gone cold tea.

“Jealousy, I’d presume Orochiamru.” So then his original theory had been more or less spot on.

But what on earth is she jealous of? Tsuyuko is his apprentice, that doesn’t change with the addition of teammates, she will still have more of his attention as team training is only a small part of the day to day.

“Why? She lives with me, she will still see me more than they will. I do not understand.” Admitting he doesn’t understand is not something he likes to do, but in times like these, it is a must.

Because he needs to understand. Needs the insight to know how to better handle Tsuyuko in the future. Jealousy is not something he ever expected from her.

Tsunade takes a sip of her tea, she levels him with an unimpressed look.

“I thought we already discussed how she views you as a parent. Why are you so confused? I remember how I felt when the idea of a younger brother was proposed.” He hums, yes he did seem to recall how irate she was over the news of a younger sibling.

Orochimaru on the other hand isn’t quite convinced Tsuyuko sees him as a parent. The incident from the other night was still fresh on his mind, but really that had to be because she was so tired. No other reason.

“You were downright spitting for quite some time.” He recounts, the memory blurry as it’s been over eleven years. But he does vaguely

recall that. Tsunade laughs.

“Exactly. And look, I'm not happy with the idea of Tsuyuko blowing up at my baby brother and his best friend, but I get why it happened.” Tsunade stands, stepping around her desk taking the now empty tea cup with her to refill from the small eclectic pot she kept in the office. Orochimaru denies a cup when she offers, he won't be much longer.

He'll need to be home when Tsuyuko decides to return. He'd checked on her location before turning up to the hospital; she was still at the Nara compound so he wasn't too worried- she'd be safe there.

“How do I fix it? She needs to get along with her teammates.” She doesn't have to like them, hell he didn't like Tsunade and Jiraiya until more recently, but she does have to be willing to work with them. Tsunade levels him with another unimpressed look.

She sighs, walking back over to the desk with her new warm cup of tea. Tsunade takes a few sips before setting it down to be forgotten until it's cold.

“Orochimaru, you know that child better than anyone in this village. Why are you asking me? She's your daughter not mine.”

“She's not..” He tries to deny it, but Tsunade pins him with a look that is not quite nice. Once that says if he denies or lies to her she will be very cross. Tsunade shoves her finger into his arm.

“Her temper tantrum says otherwise, your reaction says otherwise.” He grabs her hand. Tsunade grins, feral and amused, Orochimaru returns the grin with an annoyed eye roll.

“I'm twenty-five. I am not... I'd be a terrible parent.” He concedes, no denying it. Orochimaru knows he is many things, but parent is not one of them. Tsunade pulls her hand out of his.

“You are many things but a terrible parent isn't one of them, Orochimaru.” She pats his arm. Orochimaru sighs, he feels ancient. Today has been long and it's not even midday.

“And if I ruin her?” He was not a good person, not by any standard of the meaning. Tsuyuko could be a good person, she probably had been in the life she'd already lived. She is a child that he is solely responsible for shaping in this harsh cruel world.

Orochimaru needs to do better by her than what was done by him.

“You won’t. I don’t know how you’ve missed it but Tsuyuko looks at you like you’ve hung the stars themselves. She adores you.” Tsunade tries to reassure. Except..

He was evil in the story Tsuyuko knew. He wasn’t quite good here either, he still had his ambitions. There was nothing about him that was deserving of a child’s adoration.

“Why?” He just doesn’t understand, he needs to understand. What did he do? How was he of all people... Tsunade raises her brow, she sighs.

“You know what, I’m not answering that, you two absolutely deserve each other though. Now get out of my office, I’m busy.”

He leaves without another word.

Orochimaru waits for Tsuyuko to return home, it’s not terribly late because despite her absolut outrageous attitude earlier in the day she was still a somewhat sensible genin who knew better than to be out after curfew. Tsuyuko doesn’t startle when she locks eyes with him. He’s standing in her usual spot, how the tables have turned.

“You almost missed curfew.” He informs her without missing a beat. Apparently that’s all it takes before he has a sobbing mass of a problem child in his arms. Or well burrowed into his legs, but the point remains. His apprentice is once again crying on him.

“I’m sorry.” She sobs, and he nearly says he’s not the one she should be apologizing too. He doesn’t. Because there’s a part of him that also appreciates the apology.

She had run off again after letting her emotions get the best of her. He hates when she does that. It’s not safe, number one, and number two he’d rather her just tell him why she was upset in the first place. He may be a genius, but he’d appreciate not having to hunt down answers every now and again. Orochimaru pats her head.

“I know you are. What I don’t know, or well don’t understand, is why you reacted as you did.” She sniffles but he knows his point has been

made and that he expects an answer.

“Nawaki’s death breaks you.” Tsuyuko whispers, he almost doesn’t hear it because she’s still partially sobbing. Orochimaru pats her head.

“Which is why we aren’t going to let him die.” A simple solution, really. If Nawaki’s death during the next era of war and loss is his breaking point in another life (*although he knows that while he may care for Tsunade’s little brother, he knows without a shadow of a doubt the only death that would break him is the one closest to home*) then he won’t allow that to come to be. Tsuyuko sniffles while rubbing her eyes.

“Sensei I don’t want to share.” She complains, he hums, his hand still resting on her head. Orochimaru runs his hand through her messy bangs.

“Yes you made that very clear earlier.” He replies, and she headbutts his leg.

“You don’t get it.” Orochimaru rolls his eyes at her grumbled counter. He does push her head back so she stops headbutting his leg.

“Then help me understand Tsuyuko-chan.”

“I can’t explain.” She pouts, crossing her arms over her chest. Orochimaru takes a deep breath.

“You can, you just don’t want to.” He chides, because he knows she is perfectly capable of explaining herself. Tsuyuko bites her lip, digging her fingers into her arms, but seems to realize what’s she’s doing because she drops her arms and burrows herself back into his leg.

“I.. I... you’re more than just sensei to me. And I don’t want you to decide a different student is more important than me.” Is the muffle response. Orochimaru pushes back against his own shock.

Tsunade was right. He was never going to tell her such.

“Hmmm, I think I’m beginning to see what the problem is.”

“Don’t make fun of me.” Tsuyuko looks up just to pout at him, lower lip puffed out and everything. He doesn’t laugh.

“I’m not. I would never.” But her lip wobbles even more and he

knows that there are more tears just waiting to come.

Had he known, realized that this was going to be so hard for her- he would have gone about the entire thing differently. Maybe even take Tsunade up on her offer. But, he really hadn't considered that this was going to be such a mountain for Tsuyuko.

"It's not fair. I don't want to be jealous... but I just... you're my parent. I don't.. I don't want to share- okay. And logically I know teammates are not a bad thing... but.." She trails off, but Orochimaru thinks he understands what she isn't saying. He tugs at a wild curl.

"In another reality you've seen the death of one of your new teammates ruin me." He notes. Tsuyuko nods. So it does seem to be what he suspected.

"It's selfish... but what happens to me if I have to lose you. I don't want to lose you. Your death will break me." Tsuyuko speaks through tears beginning to fall. It's rather pitiful. *As yours will mine child.* He thinks but doesn't say, instead he sighs crouching down to her level.

Orochimaru tucks a wayward curl behind her ear. He wipes more tears off freckled stained cheeks. He doesn't take his hand off her cheek, instead holding her face gently, letting still falling tears gather on his thumb. Tsuyuko glances at him from under dark lashes. Not quite meeting his gaze but knowing that he does expect her attention.

"I'm not going anywhere Tsuyuko. There is no power on this planet that could take me from you. Do you understand? You are mine. My apprentice, my stubborn little genin, my child. I may not be your biological parent, but you are still my daughter. Nothing is going to change that." Orochimaru speaks this reassurance firmly. He does not lie or hold his tongue. He knows that this is what needs to be said. Knows that this is what she needs from him.

Tsuyuko's eyes grow bigger and bigger with each word.

"Do you mean that sensei?" He moves his hand from her face to rest on her shoulder. Letting his chakra brush against hers is soft warm reassurance. Let her feel for herself the truth of his words.

Words could lie and sincerity forged, but their chakra always reveals their true intention.

"Have I given you any reason to think I would lie to you?" He adds for extra measure, Tsuyuko shakes her head. For the first time all day she



lets her own chakra brush back against his.

“No... no you haven't. Thank you.” For the second time that evening finds his sobbing child wrapping her arms around him. This time however he wraps an arm around her, pulling her close. Tsuyuko nuzzles her face that is coated in tears and snot into his sweatshirt covered shoulder. At least she isn't sick. Orochimaru holds her until she pulls away.

His knees only slightly protest when he stands up straight. Tsuyuko leans into his leg. He smiles despite himself, resting his hand on her head. Tsuyuko looks up and blinks slowly. Her eyes are still red rimmed from crying, but it doesn't look like she'll be doing any more of that tonight. Orochimaru sighs.

“You do know you have to apologize to the boys, right?” He tells her and Tsuyuko finds it necessary to headbut his leg again.

“I will tomorrow.” She grumbles, rubbing her eyes while she yawns.

“Good. You might have made curfew but you missed dinner.” He informs her, shoving her along gently to the kitchen. If she hadn't eaten at the Nara's he'd make her a snack. Tsuyuko's only protest at being shoved is to latch on to his sweatpants, practically forcing him to drag her along like a sloth.

“I ate at Shika's.” He checks a snack off the mental list then and continues on to the kitchen. It would be easier to pick her up, but also there is some sort of fun to this. A good way to test how long she can hold on.

“Ah I presumed you might, I'm going to make tea- do you want any?” He pulls down the kettle, and the box of the tea they keep evenings like these.

“Hai chichi.” This time it is not mumbled in a sleepy haze, despite how she continues to rub at her eyes and yawn. Tsuyuko, while tired, is aware. Orochimaru smiles fondly, he ruffles her hair.

“Only inside the house. I don't want you to be in unnecessary danger.” The change in the dynamic, now official for them both, as a parent and child was one that could only be inside their home as much as they could keep it here. Until Tsuyuko was old enough to truly protect herself, Orochimaru would not put her in any unnecessary danger.

If it was known that she was the adopted child of a sannin, not just a

student- well it wouldn't bode well for her. He has enemies, both inside and out of the land of fire.

"I figured as much." Tsuyuko bobs her head in agreement.

"Smart girl. Now tea and then bed." Water boils and he parses out leaves in small sachets and places one in each cup. Tsuyuko peels herself off his leg to go get the milk from the fridge without being told to, stumbling a bit as she walks. She's gone for not even five seconds and when she returns after setting the milk container on the counter proceeds to use his leg as a prop.

"I'm not tired." She yawns. Orochimaru snorts, he shakes his head.

"Mhmm, the yawn and stumbling steps say otherwise Yuu-chan." He pours the hot water into their cups. She pokes him in the knee.

"Sleep is overrated."

"Is it now?" He intones, grabbing the milk to add after a moment. It can all steep together, he gets the feeling tomorrow will be another long day and he would like for them both to at least sleep for a few hours.

"Mhmmm. Pick me up." Tsuyuko demands, falling further into his leg. Orochimaru sets the kettle down.

"You are perfectly capable of standing next to me." He picks her up anyway. Tsuyuko lays her head on his shoulder.

"Chichi.." He brushes her bangs from her eyes so he can see her face. Tsuyuko bites her lip.

"Hmmm?" He stirs both of the cups, removing the leaves sachets from the cups. Tsuyuko reaches for her cup, he hands it to her and she immediately takes a few sips despite how hot it still is. Orochimaru leaves his own cup on the countertop to cool for a moment longer.

"I did it again... that, earlier today- it wasn't shunshin." Tsuyuko whispers, he rubs her back.

Well then. He takes a sip from his own tea mug. That was not ideal. But, now that it's happened again. The list of things to do tomorrow keeps growing.

"Guess I need to talk to Sakumo tomorrow then. However, right now

it is bedtime, finish your tea Yuu-chan.” He downs the rest of his tea, setting it in the sink for later.

“Hai, chichi.” Orochimaru ignores the warm feeling that builds in his chest, not willing to admit how sweet he finds the endearment. Tsuyuko drinks her tea as if she hasn’t a single idea how the word resonates with him. How much she has changed his life. He rubs her back more absentmindedly than usual as she finishes her tea.

He sets the empty mug in the sink next to his. Orochimaru carries her out of the kitchen and down the hall, bypassing her room to grab fresh pajamas for them both from the dryer. Tsuyuko pouts when he sets her down in the bathroom, he sets her pajamas on the counter top.

“Brush your teeth.” He reminds gently before stepping around the corner to change his own shirt. There was no way he was going to sleep covered in her snot. The sink turns on so he leaves her to that. Orochimaru grumbles at the basket of dirty clothes he spies on top of the empty wash.

At least Jiraiya managed to actually put the clothes in the basket this time.

“Can I sleep in your room? I’m cold.” Tsuyuko emerges from the bathroom, just as he’s pulling his clean shirt over his head. He scoffs.

“It’s not that cold child.” She sticks her tongue out at him, Orochimaru rolls his eyes. Tsuyuko grins as she knocks into him.

Orochimaru picks her up and throws her over his shoulder, he grabs an extra blanket from the linen closet on the way to his room. Her giggles are soft but echo around the room when he gently tosses her down on the bed. He shakes his head. “Go to bed, if you’re not asleep within the next five minutes I’m taking you to your own room.”

Tsuyuko immediately stops giggling, she burrows under the comforter on his bed. Orochimaru tosses another over her just to make sure she’ll be warm.

“Goodnight Tsuyuko.”

“Night chichi. Love you.” She mumbles, sleep taking hold quickly.

That does perhaps catch him off guard. Tsuyuko apparently has no qualms saying the things that are going to catch him off guard right before she dozes off. Because no sooner has she said that, she’s rolling

into a ball and closing her off.

Never before would have considered himself worthy, capable even to be someone's parent. With no parents of his own to take clue and guidance from, nothing to draw off of there was no assurance that this was the right call. He may not know why, why him, may not understand why she gave him a chance when everything told her the contrary. Orochimaru doesn't know how to be a good parent. But.. Tsuyuko is counting on him, and he's certainly not going to let her down.

Orochimaru tugs at a wild curl.

"Love you too."

## Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the love on the last chapter! I feel this chapter was a nice mix of hurt/comfort, so yea- the next chapter will more likely than not be similar in tone of hurt/comfort... maybe lol

anyway thank you for reading!! I hope you all enjoyed the chapter <3

(Also I know traditionally chichi is not used in direct conversation to your father in Japanese. I've been studying Japan and its customs for a long time I'm well aware of the rule I am breaking by using it in this way. I do not need comments telling me that I'm using it wrong, I am aware. It's intentional. As for why I am using it wrong well there are a few reasons and most will be addressed sooner or later in the fic. One of the reasons is Chichi can be passed off as a nickname for Orochimaru using the 'chi' part in his own name as the base, it just happened to sounds like that other word for dad. Because Orochimaru isn't expecting a nickname(in the last chapter when Tsuyuko is barely awake) the natural conclusion is that she's calling him dad.

Also, on a side note- Konoha isn't Japan, it has Japanese influences in its designs and whatnot but it is not Japan. As such rules for politeness based on how you call someone can be different. Some things to consider before anyone decides to comment that chichi isn't correct form. I know that it's not traditionally correct.

This is fanfiction, this is for fun, it doesn't have to always be factually accurate. On that note, I will delete any comment that I

feel is rude, unnecessary and just not a vibe. You are reading this content for free, for fun, criticism and critiques of the work are not asked for and are not welcome. Comments that contain unsolicited critiques and criticism will be deleted and blocked. That is all.)

:)

# Why not both? Two things can be true at once..

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~..~

Team training goes better the next day, than it had the day before. Tsuyuko apologizes for the harshness of her words as well as her ‘explosive’ reaction. The apology earns the young genin being caught in a headlock, a playful, non-malicious one, by Senju Nawaki. Who does not seem to care that she is glaring a dagger through his skull.

If anything the boy seems rather unphased and happy, Orochimaru thinks that he needs to arrange a mental evaluation for Nawaki. Of course while he may make that mental note he doesn’t move from his spot in the tree above them watching the interaction closely. He’d step in if the situation escalated any but at the moment it seemed fairly typical of genin.

“Senju-san, I will lick you if you do not let me go right now.” Tsuyuko warns, with the grace of a nine year old, Orochimaru shakes his head. Why must she be like this? At least she didn’t threaten to bite him.

Nawaki pouts, but doesn’t let up his hold. Orochimaru maintains his distance from the three as they are supposed to be doing cool down stretches. They are not, he wonders if this is how Sakumo feels with his own trio of genin.

How many times has he heard the other man complain about how often the cool down gets derailed? Far too many, especially since he and Sakumo barely interacted outside of the jounin station and ANBU.

“Un-un, none of that. It’s Nawaki, we’re teammates now. Right, Himura?” Nawaki declares, Tsuyuko stops squirming in his hold to stare at him, it’s her typical ‘I think you’re an idiot’ stare and he has to keep from laughing. Especially when the look is nearly echoed by Hyuga Himura.

These children. Are ridiculous, and may actually cause him to go prematurely gray. Joy.

"I suppose that is an accurate assessment of our new status. But perhaps, you should let Tsuyuko-senpai go. I hear she bites." Himura intones, Nawaki looks down at Tsuyuko with a raised brow. She smirks at him, it's a near feral thing.

"I do. See, fangs." Tsuyuko bares her teeth. Orochimaru sighs, it is perhaps time to intervene. He remembers something about Tsuyuko biting another child while she was in academy and he would not like to test that limit today.

He jumps out of the tree from where he's been watching them. The only acknowledgement comes from Himura glancing up. Nawaki seems perfectly content to play twenty questions with Tsuyuko, who looks like she's trying to be civil despite being held in a headlock.

"Oh, are they poisonous like Orochimaru-sensei's? Does that mean you signed a contract with the snake clan?" Nawaki rambles, not bothering to breathe.

Orochimaru realizes then that his team is two too many full of children that ramble their questions without breathing. He continues walking over to them. Tsuyuko huffs at the questions, she stops struggling to give Nawaki the uttermost unimpressed look in her arsenal of looks.

"It's venomous you dumbass. Venomous. Snakes are venomous, not poisonous in most cases. Didn't Tsunade-shishou teach you anything?" She somehow managed to poke Nawaki's cheek. Orochimaru sighs.

"Tsuyuko-chan to not antagonize your teammates." He warns, stopping just next to Himura who seems content to just watch the chaos unfold. Tsuyuko sticks her tongue out at him.

He levels her with his own unamused look.

"We're cool, Orochimaru-sensei!" Nawaki exclaims, still maintaining his hold on Tsuyuko. Orochimaru will give the boy some credit, this was an impressive feat.

Tsuyuko was a rather slippery child when she wanted to be. It spoke a lot to Nawaki's stamina to be able to hold her that long while she half tried to get out of his hold. Of course if she fully tried Nawaki would have been on the ground by now, but that was neither here nor there. Orochimaru hums.

"If the three of you still have this much energy then perhaps you need

to run laps.” He tells them. Before they can react to his serious threat, Tsuyuko leans down and licks her teammate's arm.

“Gross. Eww you actually licked me. Is my arm going to fall off now?” Nawaki half screeches, flinging his arm wildly, he immediately lets Tsuyuko go. Half shoving her away as he examines the spit on his arm. She stumbles. Apparently incapable of maintaining her own momentum.

He appears behind his apprentice no second later, hand on his daughter's shoulder, steadying her easy enough. His chakra brushes against her, a gentle reminder. Tsuyuko takes a deep breath. Good. Orochimaru removes his hand.

“No. My spit isn’t poisonous... yet.” Tsuyuko teases, cheeky smile and hands on her hips. Nawaki gasps dramatically with flare for effect, much like his older sister.

“What do you mean yet?! Do we need to get rabies shots?” The boy exclaimed. Orochimaru shakes his head, what a curious notion.

“Nawaki, I believe Tsuyuko-senpai is pulling your leg.” Himura pipes up, Orochimaru considers telling the boys that Tsuyuko wasn’t kidding. But, she beats him to it.

“If that helps you sleep at night. And no you don’t need rabies shots, but you probably will require immunization boosters the longer we are teammates since one of my goals is to become a poison master.” Tsuyuko plops down, next to him, leaning a bit into his leg.

While Nawaki’s stamina would more than likely be what saves his life in the future, Tsuyuko was going to need to work on hers. It’s a no issue right now as she is still physically younger than her teammates and has time to build her stamina up- and while her stamina was on par with other shinobi her age, it was still not ideal for things like simple team training to wear her down like this.

Nawaki crouches down, not quite sitting in the grass but enough that he’s not talking down to Tsuyuko. It is a very kind show of respect Orochimaru knows, he isn’t quite sure about his first student. Tsuyuko blinks slowly at Nawaki. Himura is the only one who continues their cool down exercises. Orochimaru resists the urge to sigh again, they better not come crying to him when all their muscles seize up.

“I thought you were going to be a medic?” Nawaki questions carefully. Tsuyuko shrugs, she unties her hair from the confines of a



bun that had turned into a bee's hive. Getting frustrated when her hair knots further around her fingers.

Tsuyuko yanks at her hair hard before giving up. It remains a tangled mess. A problem for post shower and the heavy duty detangler they keep at home. She sighs, finally giving Nawaki a verbal answer.

"Why not both? Medicine and poison go hand in hand." She quips.

"I guess? Does nee-chan know?" Nawaki doesn't seem quite convinced, Tsuyuko rolls her eyes. Himura finishes his cool down exercises and joins them.

"Obviously. I'm required to have extra ethics lessons as a result." Ethics lessons that she had argued with him about for over a month. Ethics lessons that he wasn't quite sure she needed given her background, but it was still the requirement for poison masters in the land of fire to have them.

"Eww gross, that stinks for you." Nawaki seems to understand her plight or at least has some level of skill when it comes to feigning empathy, Tsuyuko nods solemnly.

"It really does."

"Why would that require more ethics?" The other boy questions after a moment. Tsuyuko hums, pulling a kunai from her pouch to apparently sharpen. Orochimaru doesn't comment, more interested in watching this entire conversation unfold.

"Value of life, as a poison master- because what I will be able to do can and most likely will harm and or kill a lot of people... I need to be doubly aware of my choices, and I suppose they're to make sure I'll only use these skills at the whim of the village. Which means I have to understand concepts like what is 'good for the village' or some bs." She shrugs, examining her blade carefully.

"That sounds tedious." Nawaki mumbles.

"It can be. But if we ever have to fight Suna again like we have in the past, having someone who knows and understands the breakdowns of poisons could save a lot of lives." She tells them. Orochimaru nods behind her.

It would be helpful to have their own poison master if Suna decided to break their tentative alliance. Which was still relatively new and

fickle.

“Cue the medic aspect.” Himura drones without much inflection.

“Cue the medic aspect indeed.”

“Which is where we fit in then, as range and defense.” Nawaki pipes up excitedly. He’s obviously a team player. Tsuyuko however, considers his excitement and pauses. She sets her kunai in her lap.

“Yeea, in a way, I think. I wasn’t actually listening yesterday when sensei was going over team structure.” She admits with a small shrug. Orochimaru sighs.

Of course she wasn’t listening. Why would she bother to listen when he is going over important information? He shouldn’t be surprised, considering how yesterday went, but he is beyond exasperated with her for it.

“Oof, well we can discuss it over lunch if you want. And look, I know this isn’t what you were expecting- but if it means anything we are excited to be your teammates. So no hard feelings.” Nawaki holds out his hand, Tsuyuko takes it with a small smile.

“Thanks, and again- I acted poorly yesterday and am sorry. I hope I am a better teammate in the future.”

Orochimaru clears his throat, garnering the attention of all three genin. He levels them all with his most unimpressed look.

“Since the three of you have lost all ability to focus on cool down exercises, you are dismissed for today. Tomorrow will be more of the same and possibly d-ranks if there are any available that I think will benefit the three of you.”

“Hai, sensei!” The boys chorus together, Tsuyuko sticks her tongue out. Orochimaru nudges her rather roughly with his knee.

“Now I will be at the lab for the rest of the evening, do not make menaces of yourselves. And if you decide to for some forsaken reason, do not get caught. Tsuyuko-” He turns his eyes on her. She grins unapologetically.

“Sensei?”

“We have dinner plans tonight.” Tsuyuko nods at the reminder, then

completely turns her attention back to her teammates.

“Oh, cool. Hey Nawaki and Himura-” She tucks her kunai back into her weapons pouch, standing up and dusting herself off. Her hair is still a mess, and Orochimaru is not looking forward to untangling it later.

“Yea?”

“Do you want to meet my plants? We can get takeout from one of the Akimichi stands on the way.” Tsuyuko shuffles her foot nervously. Nawaki smiles.

“Sounds good to me, Himura?”

“I am fine with this.” Himura agrees as he stands.

“Cool. Sensei?” Tsuyuko turns, eyes seeking approval. Orochimaru sighs.

“Get enough for Minato, he’ll be at the estate about now.”

“Mmkay.”

“Dismissed.” The three scurry away, Tsuyuko calls out for a race that she will not win and the boys chase after her.

Orochimaru rolls his eyes. The kids were going to be alright, if they were going to try his patience relentlessly.

“So how likely are you to intentionally poison us going forward?” Nawaki questions while they’re waiting for their to-go order. Tsuyuko considers Tsunade’s younger brother for a long moment.

“Very, but only because you’ll need to build up natural immunities to some of my poisons and sensei will be monitoring it. I’d be a shitty poison master if my poisons kill my teammates yea.” She tells them both, no point hiding the truth of the matter.

It was very likely that they would be intentionally poisoned by her at some point in the near future. For their own safety it was a must.

“That makes sense to me.” Himura intones, while Nawaki pouts. Tsuyuko smirks.

She grabs their to-go order, paying the stall quickly. There is a sliver of nerves beginning to pool in her stomach. So best to get on with it.

“Alright enough dallying, onward boys.”

“Whatever you say Tsuyuko-senpai.”

Orochimaru returns home some hours later to find, to really no surprise, Tsuyuko standing on the coffee table giving a mini lecture about the fundamental difference between poison and venom. He slips out of his sandals, and just leans against the doorframe to watch. This should be some form of entertainment.

Minato is the only child who looks up to greet him with a small wave, a testament to the boy's natural sensor capabilities because Orochimaru was still part way concealing his chakra. He nods curtly, more focused on his students and the mini lecture taking place in his living room.

“So if you lick me it's poisonous, but if you bite me then it's venomous?” Nawaki asks for clarification.

“Yes- if my spit contained toxins that you then absorbed into your skin and it caused you harm it would be poisonous. Also if you breathed in something like toxic gas, or ingested say copious amounts of sake all of that could be considered poisoning yourself.” Tsuyuko explains a basic version of the difference, but enough to suffice as an answer.

“Venomous on the other hand requires injection, via needle, or fangs usually. But Tsuyuko, you better not be biting your teammates. You know baby snakes are far more deadly than adults.” Tsuyuko shrugs from her spot, Nawaki and Himura both look over and wave.

“I don't actually bite people.” Tsuyuko pouts.

“You bit that one kid in the academy.” Himura points out helpfully. Orochimura recalls that incident from her files. Tsuyuko's face scrunches into confusion.

“I do not recall this.”

“It was that civilian girl, she called Shikaku-senpai lazy.” Nawaki offers. But the confusion doesn't clear from his child's face.

“That doesn’t sound like something I would do.” She protests. Minato, Nawaki and Himura all stare at her disbelieving. Orochimaru doesn’t know whether to sigh or roll his eyes. He clears his throat.

“Really now? Also, child were you raised in a barn, get off the table.”

“I mean technically...”

“You were raised in a port side village until you were four, which is still not a barn. Off my furniture child.” Orochimaru pushes off the door frame finally stepping all the way into the main living area of the house. His steps are purposeful as he walks over to pluck Tsuyuko off the table.

“I don’t remember biting anyone.” Tsuyuko admits.

“It’s in your file.” Orochimaru tells her as he sets her on the ground.

“Huh.” Tsuyuko walks over to the couch and plops down next to Minato. He pats her head.

“You had a bad headache at the time, if that makes a difference.” Minato tells her. Nawaki and Himura nod, so despite not being in the same friend circle, news travels. Orochimaru shakes his head.

“Ohhh, I must have done it in a haze then.” Tsuyuko realizes, clasping her hands together as all the pieces start to make sense. Orochimaru has no doubts she doesn’t remember this incident in the slightest.

He walks into the kitchen to start a pot of tea, droning out the conversation that continues to happen behind him.

*“Do you still get headaches like that Tsuyuko-chah?”*

*“Unfortunately. They’re more manageable now, but yea.”*

Orochimaru fills the kettle with water, sets it on the stove to start boiling. He’d much prefer coffee right now but something tells him the added jitters are not going to be welcome later this evening. He has a sinking feeling that this dinner party is not going to go as he wants.

*“That is truly unfortunate.”*

*“Anything we can do to help?”*

With the kettle set to boil he walks back into the living room. Whistling to catch all the children’s attention before they start to

spiral.

“We can discuss all of your weaknesses tomorrow during team training. While it is good to see you all getting along, it is getting late and the two of you need to be heading home for now.” He points to the clock on the wall. Nawaki turns a concerning shade of white.

“Oh geez, you’re right- come on, Himura let’s go. Maybe we can beat nee-chan home so she doesn’t flip.” Nawaki starts to rush, pulling Himura along with him. Slipping their shoes back on quickly. Haphazardly if Orochimaru is being honest.

“Best of luck.” Tsuyuko gets off the couch, and she walks over to wave goodbye.

“Thanks, see ya tomorrow Tsuyuko, bye Orochimaru-sensei! Bye Minato-senpai!” Minato barely looks up from his scroll to smile and wave. Orochimaru sighs when the door slams shut.

Tsuyuko waits for Nawaki and Himura to be out of the door before she is turning on her heel heading towards him. “Chichi, what time is dinner?”

“In an hour, go wash up. You look a mess.” He tugs gently at her still wild and unruly curls. Tsuyuko pouts.

“I need to wash my hair.” She complains, Orochimura nods. She in fact most certainly needed to wash her hair.

“I will help you detangle it before dinner, now go. Minato-kun scrolls away, study time is over.” Tsuyuko pouts but does as she is told, heading down the hall first to her room and then to the bathroom. Minato rolls up his scroll and pushes himself off the couch.

Orochimaru heads back to the kitchen as the kettle whistles. Perfect, just in time. He can have some tea before starting dinner.

“Orochimaru-san, do you need help getting dinner prepared?” Minato appears by his side as he is pouring the boiled water into his cup before adding sacheted tea leaves. The child’s eyes are bright and hopeful.

“If you would like to assist, then I’m sure I can find something for you to do.” He intone, taking a sip from the cup, setting it on the counter. Orochimaru walks over to the pantry and Minato follows.

“Sure! Do you know when sensei will be back?”

“Just in time for dinner I’m sure, did he get called away for more meetings again today?”

“Yaaa. Is everything okay?” Minato questions carefully. Orochimaru hums thinking to himself that Minato is a perceptive child, more so than most wanted to give the boy credit for. He’ll be a menace one day.

“As far as I am aware, everything is fine.” He assures, grabbing the canister of rice as well as the spice box.

“Okay, so what do you need me to do?” Minato bounces on his heels, rocking back and forth, a habit he seems to have picked up from Tsuyuko. Orochimaru sets both the rice and spice box on the counter.

“Rice, make sure to rinse it well.”

“Yes sir!” Minato quickly scurries to grab the rice from the pantry. Orochimaru continues on his way to the fridge. Now to get dinner cooked.

He couldn’t shake the feeling that something was going to go amiss tonight. He’s always been neutral about Sakumo, the other jounin never gave him bad vibes or anything that made him think that he was a threat to him. But.. he’d been so adamant about this secret.. Something was wrong.

“Orochimaru-san?” Minato interrupts that train of thought. Orochimaru sets the meat on the counter.

“Hmn, is something wrong with the rice, Minato-kun?” Orochimaru questions, even though he can see the rice is perfectly fine. There is however something about Minato’s tone that was indicative of something to be concerned about. The real question would be if the boy told him the truth. Minato sets the bowl that he’ll need to rinse the rice next to the sink, walking over to the drawer of measuring cups.

The genin takes a deep breath.

“Well, no... I unh.. do you think what Tsuyuko and I did was dangerous and wrong?” What a peculiar question to be had now of all times. Orochimaru considers the best way to answer.

He doesn't want to undermine Jiraiya's authority with his student. He also had no intention to lie to Minato either.

"Neither of those descriptions match what I think, Minato-kun." Dangerous would have been running the same experiment without supervision, without a complete know-how of the techniques required for said experiment to function. But that is not what they had done. Tsuyuko and Minato had taken a measured risk. Nothing more, nothing less.

It wasn't the children's fault that Jiraiya had reacted before thinking.

"Oh..then why did sensei?" Minato's question comes from a place of vulnerability Orochimaru realizes. As such he must be careful with his own response.

Why did some people react the way they did when it came to prodigies? Usually the answer would be fear and concern. In this case he thinks it is perhaps a bit more of a trauma response than fear.

"Because, Jiraiya like many others you will encounter until you hit puberty see you and Tsuyuko as children before they see you both as intellectuals. Do you know why I don't require Tsuyuko to tell me what she's doing?" Orochimaru poses the question, though he doubts Minato knows.

"Uh, maybe... no?"

"It's because the only way to learn your limits is to push them. I'm not always going to be directly available to ask for permission when she wants to try something new." And by knowing her limits early on, she will be able to make reasonable decisions based on her own capabilities as both a shinobi and a person.

"That makes sense." Minato continues his task. Measuring out the rice and rinsing it several times before transferring it to the rice cooker. Orochimaru resumes his own work.

"Orochimaru-san, what do you think of what we did? If you don't consider it dangerous, then what do you consider it to be?" Orochimaru glances up from the marinated meat to consider Minato.

"A measured risk. That you both experimented on in a controlled environment. And Minato-kun, while I don't see it the same way as



Jiraiya, his concerns have their own merit.”

“Two things can be true at once.” Minato agrees with a small nod. Orochimaru grins, pleased by that response. Smart boy.

“They can. Thank you for getting the rice ready, go wash up you have ink on your face.” Minato nods.

Finally he is alone in the kitchen. Now to get this all prepped and settled before Tsuyuko gets out of the shower.

## Chapter End Notes

So pleased to be getting this chapter posted today, it had been mostly done for over a month just needed to fill in the dialog, so woo

Next chapter is going to be fun :)

<3

# Secrets don't make friends...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~\*~

Dinner is an awkward affair, one in which neither Orochimaru or Tsuyuko understand why. Perhaps it is the result of the elephant still hanging in the room, the what is going on with Tsuyuko that only Sakumo seems to know. While Orochimaru hadn't expected it to be the topic they chose over dinner he did wish they would get on with it. Because really none of them have all night to be out each having their own responsibilities they will need to get to come morning time. Yet they are all insistent upon wasting time of pleasantries that have gone past their place and time.

"Tsuyuko-chan, how do you like having a team?" Suyuri asks softly, mindful of the baby in her arms. Tsuyuko looks up from absently pushing her vegetables around her plate.

"I've only had them for two days, Suyuri-san. But they seem okay I guess." Tsuyuko answers carefully, making the appropriate eye contact before looking back down at her plate to push her food around.

"Tsuyuko lectured Nawaki and Himura today on the difference between poison and venom for two hours." Minato pipes up, Tsuyuko sticks her tongue out at him. Orochimaru sighs at both genin.

Why must they behave like this?

"It wasn't two hours, it was only a half hour. They need to know the difference if they're going to be my teammates." Tsuyuko explains matter of fact as if she were giving a lecture to a group of academy students. Jiraiya snorts from his spot.

"You sound pretty high and mighty there kiddo."

"Jiraiya-san, I am going to be a poison master. If my teammates don't know the difference, that is an absolute abhorrent state of affairs." Tsuyuko huffs, she sets her utensils down and turns to him then.

"Is there something wrong with your food Tsuyuko-chan?" He

questions, knowing good and well she is done. Honestly he is surprised she managed to eat as much as she had considering her nerves and the lunch she'd had with her teammates.

"No, I'm just not hungry anymore. Can I be dismissed?" She fidgets in her seat, perhaps from two sets of eyes that usually aren't at their table. Perhaps from a simple need to move. He nods.

"Take your plate to the sink." Tsuyuko bobs her head and quickly gets up from the table. She gives the Hatake family a quick bow before doing as instructed and disappearing out of the dining area.

"She seems different from the last time I saw her." Sakumo comments after a moment, his wife rolls her eyes. But whatever comment the anbu agent has they keep to themselves.

"Today was a long day." What he doesn't tell them is that his daughter does not handle change and new things well. That the entire evening has thrown her off. If she seems different, it's because she doesn't know quite how to act right now.

Usually at this time he would be working on notes in his room or in the study upstairs while she accompanied either to give her own commentary or to work on her crochet things. But instead they were stuck having dinner with people they don't often associate with for information that wasn't being handed over.

Orochimaru listens for Tsuyuko in their wing of the house, she's doing something in her room. Quickly he glances around the room, checking the time, and the general mood. He spies Minato's empty plate.

"Minato-kun if you're still hungry there is enough for more." He carefully reminds the genin. Orochimaru knew that both Minato and Tsuyuko still struggled with their appetites from time to time as a long result of their stint in the orphanage.

So many underfed orphan academy students turn into starving genins who die on their first mission out of the village. He would not see that same fate for his daughter and Jiraiya's student.

"Oh, no. I'm full." Minato smiles brightly, a relief then. He nods, pleased to hear that.

"Fair enough kid, you don't have to stick around if you're done." Jiraiya pats his students back, an encouragement to leave. Minato nods, he does not have to be told to take his plate to the sink and does

so without the reminder.

Now with the children gone, Orochimaru turns to Sakumo. “You have information that I need.”

Sakumo sighs, to Orochimaru’s surprise he turns to his wife. Suyuri takes a deep breath handing the sleeping infant to his father. Orochimaru watches the mask of Hatake Suyuri fall and Inari’s stoic expression takes over. Intriguing.

“Orochimaru, you found Tsuyuko is Hirofu, yes?” His brow raises at that question. It was no secret that he was the one sent to Hirofu when the call of plague came. It is no secret that he was tasked to help any survivors and to burn the rest.

For a moment though he finds himself lost in the memory from nearly six years ago. He remembers walking through the streets, the smell even overwhelming for him. People dead lying in their own waste and sick, having just dropped dead where they stood. Homes with doors kicked open from looting, corpses stuck in doorways. The blood stained ground and walls. It was a truly awful site. He hadn’t had hope that he’d find anyone alive, so he planted fire bombs and such as he walked. Careful where he stepped, taking the entire scene in for what it was.

A true tragedy.

Orochimaru remembers finding the last house, up on the hill still a part of the village but secluded. He remembers the sliver of hope then, that wild hair of just maybe some people were okay. Then he remembers what he saw when he entered that house. A single child holding the hand of another dead villager.

“I found Tsuyuko when she was four years old standing next to a corpse in a village that had been ruined by plague. That village was Hirofu.” He confirms, blinking the memory away.

Briefly the Inari mask slips, Suyuri flickers back, but it is smothered down fast. He does not look at Jiraiya or Sakumo after that, he keeps his eyes on the agent across from him. Inari makes it a point to look anywhere but him. Whatever they have to tell him, is something that has been kept a secret for a long time.

“I thought she would be safe there.” Is not what he was expecting the other to say. Orochimaru schools his own surprise, noting from the corner of his eye Jiraiya does not have any of his usual tells for being

caught off guard.

“If plague had not struck Hirofu, she probably would have lived an ordinary shinobi free life.” Or as ordinary as a life could be for someone reincarnated with their past life’s memories. But he does not divulge that information.

“Suyuri..” Sakumo whispers when he sees his wife’s face crumble. Orochimaru has no idea what is going on but he is not impressed.

“Tsuyuko’s new skill is a kekkei genkai for a clan near extinction. My clan.” The anbu emotionless tactic fails, Suyuri admits quietly, she doesn’t meet his eyes. The gesture is too close to home for mere coincidence.

He knows what she isn’t saying.

“She’s your biological daughter.” An accusation slips from his lips, one fueled by a protective edge that he hopes none of them miss. As soon as he speaks there is a small gasp from the hall followed by the sound of several things being dropped or knocked over. Orochimaru stands, he leaves his plate on the table to be dealt with later.

Right now he needs to get to his child before she has a panic attack. Or before she manages to vanish and he still not know how. At least he knows why, but he needs the how as well.

Luckily he doesn’t have to go very far, Tsuyuko has only gone back to her room. Orochimaru knocks on the half cracked door. There is a tiny muffle that sounds like an affirmation to enter, followed by the most pitiful sob he’s ever heard. Gently he pushes the door open to reveal Tsuyuko sitting in the middle of her bed with her face pressed into a pillow. He shuts the door behind him, walking over to her bed slowly. Carefully he picks up a discarded project that looks like it may turn into a hat and puts it with the rest of her yarn before sitting on the foot of the bed.

It takes a moment for her to look at him from over the top of her pillow. When she does his heart breaks. Orochimaru reaches out to wipe the tears from her eyes.

“Tsuyuko, come here child.” He holds his arms open, and no sooner finds his arms full. A sobbing mess of a child in them.

Orochimaru wraps his arms around her, he evenly rubs a line across her spine. Tsuyko continues to snifle in his arms. Her face completely

buried in his chest. He can't imagine the betrayal she currently feels. His parents never abandoned him, not like this seemed to be, no they simply had died like the majority of their generation in between the first and second war.

"I don't.. I don't understand... why did she leave me there alone?" Tsuyuko manages after a moment through a stream of tears. With shaky hands and a wobbling lip. Barely pulling her face from his chest to speak.

He takes a moment to consider the best way to answer that.

"That is perhaps a question only Suyuri can answer." Eventually he settles on what is the most neutral of options. Because frankly he doesn't know why Suyuri would have left her daughter in a rural village. He can't even begin to fathom why that would be a decision made.

Or even why it took so long for the Hatake matron to come forward. Tsuyuko has been in the village for six years. At any point during this time they could have made some claim over Tsuyuko. But Suyuri had not. Instead the agent and their husband had kept pertinent information from him in regards to his student. His child.

Needless to say, Orochimaru is feeling quite vexed over the matter.

Tsuyuko nuzzles her face back into his chest. He continues to rub her back. It will be better for them all if he can get her calmer before they go back out. For now he holds his daughter while her world falls apart all over again. This entire ordeal was not going to help the abandonment issues the genin already has. Orochimaru is not pleased.

It takes ten or so minutes to get her breathing under control and for the tears to stop falling. As much as he loathes the idea they do need to go back out now, they need answers for whatever it is that causes the disappearing trick. Orochimaru stands without any issues, he doesn't put Tsuyuko down either. Tsuyuko's eyes are red and puffy from crying, she keeps her face tucked into his neck. His off duty shirt is going to be covered in tears and snot again.

In the kitchen, Orochimaru finds Jiraiya and Suyuri- Sakumo must have gone home with the baby then- drinking tea. He gives his teammate the cold shoulder for being in on this secret apparently and not telling him- not preparing him as he should have. A forewarning would have been nice. Tsuyuko doesn't look at either of them.

“Orochimaru.” Jiraiya greets, maybe he tries to take over to help. Orochimaru pins him with a glare.

“I’m not playing any more games Jiraiya. This conversation is not going to be prolonged further.” He hisses, Jiraiya holds his hands up in a mock surrender.

“Don’t bite my head off.” Jiraiya’s defenses are raised, he cares very little for the warning in his teammates voice.

“Don’t test me then.” Orochimaru reminds derisively, pinning the toad with an icy glare.

“Please don’t hold any ill feelings towards Jiraiya. It’s not his fault.” Suyuri finally speaks, it’s a diplomatic answer if he’s ever heard one. Orochimaru shifts his attention over to an agent he thought was an ally.

“That is your opinion. Which, considering the conversation from earlier I am starting to doubt, is one to trust.” He sees no reason to temper his words or his anger. Suyuri, to their credit, takes it gracefully.

“I know, I’m sorry. You were right though. I am Tsuyuko’s biological mother.” The admittance, the truth, finally spoken into life. It tells him nothing.

“Then pray tell why you abandoned her in that backwater wasteland.” His grip on Tsuyuko tightens, the memory from six years ago strong at the forefront of his memories.

“The shinobi life is cruel, I didn’t want that for her. I left her with my sister, she was supposed to be safe there.” Suyuri tells them, ever so diplomatically. Tsuyuko sits up in his lap, turning fast to glare at the shinobi sitting across from them.

“That wasn’t your decision to make. It doesn’t matter what your intentions were Suyuri-san. You don’t get to decide what kind of people your children have to become.” There is a venom that laces Tsuyuko’s tongue, her words are sharp and pointed. She doesn’t back down from them as she continues to glare at Hatake Suyuri like she is no better than an enemy.

He doesn’t reign her in or correct the behavior. Why should he? She isn’t wrong. It isn’t the decision of the parents to decide who their children become. Tsuyuko has every right to her contempt, every right

to be angry.

“I know that now, and I am sorry for the pain I've caused you Tsuyuko-chan.” Suyuri apologizes, falling into a bow. No one moves.

For a moment the entire house seems too quiet, too still. Then Tsuyuko takes a deep breath. She doesn't accept the apology, not yet, maybe not ever. Orochimaru watches her closely, he won't lie, he is exceedingly curious about what she will do next. If there is one thing she is good at it is surprising him. Although tonight he doubts there will be many surprises left from the child. Tsuyuko looks away from the shinobi, turning to meet his eyes.

“I can't, I'm going to bed.” He lets her go, she hastily leaves the room. Orochimaru takes his own deep breath then.

“You can sit up, Tsuyuko will either accept your apology in time or not. Right now the only thing left is to do everything in your power to make sure she lives to get to make that decision.” Orochimaru tells Suyuri, perhaps it is cruel. But currently he has no sympathy for the shinobi sitting across from him.

He knows that he will never truly forgive Suyuri for the hurt this has caused his daughter.

“I know. I brought every single clan scroll I have, the technique she can use- you'll find the answers in the scrolls. Thank you for having us for dinner, despite the way the evening went it was nice.” Suyuri stands, she hands him a storage scroll that supposedly holds the answers to his current problem.

“Go home to your husband and son.” Orochimaru takes the scroll with a quick dismissive nod.

He doesn't wait around for Suyuri to leave before he leaves the room himself heading back to his wing. For the first time in a long while he pulls the hallway's sliding door shut and seals it for entry from anyone who is not him or Tsuyuko. For now he has no desire to talk to Jiraiya, no desire to allow him into this part of his home. Perhaps it was too much, too far, but Jiraiya is his teammate, his friend and this was a low blow.

Orochimaru walks quietly down the hall, Tsuyuko's room is empty when he passes it. He has no doubt she will be in his room curled into a ball under his comforter and her purple blanket. His door is ajar, he pushes it open with his foot, turning the hall light off and shutting the



door behind him.

Just like he suspected there is a Tsuyuko shaped lump in his bed. Orochimaru sets the storage scroll on his side table, turning on the lamp as he goes. Tsuyuko rolls over, eyes peering out under the heavy blanket. He sits on the bed next to her, reaching out to ruffle her bangs.

“I’m sorry Tsuyuko.” Tsuyuko seems to startle with his own apology. He almost chuckles. How very typical of her.

“It’s not your fault Chichi. You didn’t know.” She whispers, voice tired and hoarse from everything. Orochimaru smiles sadly.

He should have known. Should have put it together. Yet it never even occurred to him that it could be something like this. Instead of arguing though, because it will do neither of them any good, he sighs. Right now it feels like the only thing he can do.

“Go to sleep Tsuyuko.” She nods rolling back over. Orochimaru will either move her to her own room later when he is ready to go to sleep, or he will deal with having a foot in his ribcage most of the night. A decision to be made later, he has no intention of going to bed anytime soon.

Orochimaru grabs the scroll off the side table, he gets comfortable on his bed sitting with his back against a firm pillow and the wall. After a brief debate he decided to unseal the scroll one by one. His eyes take a moment to adjust to the dim light before it isn’t an issue, and he unseals the first of many scrolls.

The scroll is titled with the clan’s name and what he assumes is the insignia. There is something about it that he can’t place. Orochimaru makes a mental note of both to check for familiarity later. For now he has much more important things to uncover.

It is going to be a long night.

## Chapter End Notes

What can I say, I hope you all enjoyed this little twist! Thank you for reading <3

# Master spies make for great storytellers...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Tsunade slips into the seat next to Jiraiya at the bar, she'd come in with Dan and another medic from the hospital and hadn't exactly been expecting to see her teammate here. Not tonight when she knew he was having dinner with the Hatakes and Orochimaru. She orders sake and something to snack on.

She has a feeling she's going to be here a while.

"Tsunade." Jiraiya barely looks up half toasting his own sake glass.

"Jiraiya." She returns easily, brow raising - something is wrong with her teammate. Jiraiya is never this subdued. Tsunade keeps her eyes trained on him until the usually jovial shinobi sighs tiredly.

"I made Orochimaru mad." Jiraiya tells her. Tsunade shrugs, that was a recurring problem with those two, she doubted it was that serious that Jiraiya would be mopping.

Right?

"He'll get over it." She grumbles, because no matter how serious the spats the two have had in the past Orochimaru and Jiraiya always eventually cleared the air.

"Probably not this time." Jiraiya doesn't hesitate to disagree with her, he takes a long sip from his cup.

"What did you do?" Tsunade wonders as her order arrives.

"My job." Then it really wouldn't make sense for Orochimaru to stay mad at Jiraiya, then understand what it means to be a spy. They know that there are things Jiraiya can't always tell them.

"Hmm, and why then do you think he won't get over it." It would be illogical for Orochimaru to hold onto some form of animosity for the long run. Tsunade thinks that despite how dramatic both men are capable of being, they are not stupid.

Holding a grudge will do neither of them any good. Especially not

now when they need to keep presenting a united front in order to take down Shimura.

“I kept a secret, one that maybe shouldn’t have been kept as long as it was.” There is an undeniable sense of guilt lingering on Jiraya’s tongue. Tsunade considers that statement for a moment.

“Oh?” Tsunade hums, pouring some sake into her cup. She doesn’t sip it yet.

“Yea.”

“Does it involve my brat?” Jiraiya’s resulting silence is enough of an answer. Tsunade sighs, she pours herself another cup of sake.

“He’ll forgive you, eventually, maybe. You know how he is.” About Tsuyuko, she doesn’t say. Jiraiya hums as he brings his own cup to his lips.

“He seal locked his side of the house.” Tsunade grimaces, it's been a while since Orochimaru has done that. Not since they were teenagers. For that to be a necessary measure in their teammates eyes, then Jiraiya must have royally fucked up.

“Then you need to give him time. I don't know what happened, but from that it does sound like you broke his trust.”

Somedays later Tsuyuko wakes up nearly soaked through her sheets and a headache that she is convinced is from the depths of the abyss itself. It is quickly determined that she had the beginning of a cold. Tsuyuko thinks that for someone who could survive something like what happened in Hirofu being bested by the common cold is absolute horse shit. Orochimaru leaves her with clear instructions to rest, and that Tsunade will be by to check on her since he has other students to oversee. Nawaki and Himura keep their distance when they stop by to head out with Orochimaru that morning but they do wish her a speedy recovery. Tsuyuko thanks them for it, and then promptly goes back to sleep since Orochimaru stripped her bed when she was taking a cold shower to get her fever under control.

Hours later, or what feels like hours, she wakes up, head still hurting but not quite as bad as it had first thing this morning, fever still annoyingly present and now she has congestion to worry about. It is

the most annoyed she has felt with herself in a long time. She also just loathes being sick entirely. Tsuyuko rolls off her bed hitting the ground with a small thud before she stands on shaky legs with her blanket wrapped around her head. None of her other pajamas had been clean this morning so she's in one of Orochimaru's old shirts from his chunin days. It's huge on her, but it's made from a material that doesn't keep heat like her pajamas would so she's not as clammy if still annoyed by the whole thing.

She hates being sick.

Tsuyuko shuffles down the hall, probably making a horrendous amount of noise for a shinobi in training but she hardly cares. She needs tea for the congestion and sore throat, as well as *-if it's been several hours-* another round of medicine for her headache and fever. Joy.

In the kitchen standing at the island drinking a cup of coffee is Jiraiya, whom she has not seen in several days. Tsuyuko's eyes feel heavy, she blinks a few times to try and clear the feeling. It doesn't go away.

"You look rough, kid." Jiraiya glances over and smiles softly despite the familiar teasing edge to his voice. Tsuyuko, unlike Orochimaru, has no reason to give Jiraiya the cold shoulder, shrugs. She feels rough.

"I'm sick." She pouts shuffling over to the coffee pot knowing that's where her medication and tea will be. It's where Chichi said he'd leave them for her.

"Seems so. Need help?" Jiraiya sets his own coffee mug down. Tsuyuko nods and he walks up behind her, carefully not to crowd her.

"Can you get me the kettle, my throat hurts and I want tea." She points half-heartedly at the cabinet that contains the kettle. Jiraiya pats her head.

"Sure, why don't you sit on the barstool. I'll make your tea." He gestures over to the island and the stools. Tsuyuko hesitates, this seemed like a lot of work for him to go through for her.

"Are you sure?" She asks, chewing on her lip, Jiraiya smiles easily.

"Yea, sure am, kid. Are you up for talking? I'm leaving for a mission in a bit but there is a few things I wanted to tell you." He speaks low and

quick, considerate of her headache. Tsuyuko ambles over to the island to take a seat. She nods once she's settled.

"I'm up for listening. So go ahead, as long as you keep this volume. My head hurts too." Regardless, he seemed to realize that it feels important to tack on for the reminder. Jiraiya nods, he seems unbothered even goes so far to quip.

"Bested by the cold it seems."

"Yea, I hate it." She pouts, crossing her arms over her chest and kicking her feet. Really she hates being sick so much. Jiraiya chuckles softly.

"I bet." Jiraiya fills the kettle with water and sets it on a burner to start to warm. Afterwards he grabs her medicine and brings it over to where she is sitting with a cup of water and a thermometer. Tsuyuko grabs the thermometer first, a baseline temp before medicine was always ideal and she'd need to note it anyway.

Jiraiya doesn't begin to speak immediately. Instead he turns his back to her to grab a teacup and the tea, setting them next to the stove top. Tsuyuko watches him work through heavy crust laden eyes. It's weird to see Jiraiya be this subdued.

"Is sensei still mad at you?" She finds herself asking after the moment of silence becomes too much for her. Jiraiya hums.

"Yeah, he is. Don't worry though. This is pretty typical for us." He reassures, Tsuyuko pins him with a look she hopes he interprets as she thinks he's a bad liar.

If she were a normal genin who didn't know the two as well as she did this lie would work. But she's not a normal genin and she doesn't appreciate being lied to like one.

"I guess. Although the only people he should be upset with are the Hatakes, why is he mad at you for doing your job?" She asks while pouring the correct dosage for her cold medicine into the little cup.

"Because it directly involved you kid. What's your temp?" He questions seemingly genuinely concerned about her well being, Tsuyuko hums watching him pour the hot water into the tea cup.

"Annoying, still high but not as high as this morning." She grumbles, eying the gross colored liquid with distaste. There was just something

so off putting about the color of medicine.

“Good, take the meds. Do you want honey?” Jiraiya holds up the honey jar they’d bought recently from someone in the Aburame clan, a very kind old man who let Tsuyuko get an up close look at the bees. Tsuyuko nods, biting back her disgust and downing the cold medicine in one quick go.

It is absolutely disgusting in flavor and thick like sap. She loathes every minute of it.

“Please.” Honey will be good for her throat, hitting the spot the medicine misses.

“Honey makes everything better.” Jiraiya agrees, he scoops a generous amount into her cup. Perfect.

“What is it that you wanted to tell me?” Tsuyuko adjusts to cross her arms on the counter to use them as a cushion for her face. It’s not the most comfortable, but she’ll manage.

Jiraiya brings her a cup of tea, he pulls the other barstool to the other side of the counter to sit across from her. Despite how he tries to be quiet it still makes a horrid screeching sound causing her to wince slightly. “First I am sorry that this secret caused you a lot of grief.”

“Secret keeping is your job, can’t really fault you for doing it for your friends.” Tsuyuko mumbles.

Jiraiya is a spymaster. Keeping secrets is his job. Besides, it's not like he left her in Hirofu to watch her village die a horrible death.

“It’s a bit more than that kid.” He mumbles, finally taking a seat across from her.

“More to the story than Suyuri-san didn’t want me to be a shinobi.” Tsuyuko hedges, lifting her head up a bit to meet his eyes. Jiraiya nods.

“There is. I’ve been given permission to tell you the full story, since I know you aren’t reading the scrolls.” Tsuyuko groans at the mention of the scrolls, she hasn’t seen them yet and frankly by the sheer volume of them she isn’t sure she wants to. Thankfully Orochimaru has been busy with them so she hasn’t had to deal with them.

“Chichi has been hoarding them.” it's close enough to the truth,

Jiraiya cracks a weary smile. He takes a sip from his own tea cup.

“Fair enough, he’s looking for answers so he can help you best going forward.” He tells her, Tsuyuko nods. She knows why Orochimaru has been hoarding them.

“Yea, I just want to know why I vanish.” Tsuyuko sips her own tea, the warm liquid feels good against her sore throat.

“I imagine that would be high on your priority list. Now, if you want, I have a story to tell.” Jiraiya leans forward, he sets his cup down. Tsuyuko grins, or well the best she can between sips.

“I’m all ears Jiraiya-san.” He nods, and then jumps right into the story.

“Right before the second war broke out ten years ago, a group of Konoha shinobi were captured by Iwa for information- despite the treaty tension was still high following the end of the first war.” He begins.

Tsuyuko lets the information roll around for a moment, she has a feeling she already knows how this story is going to go and she doesn’t like it.

“Hence why there was a second, and why there will be a third.” She grumbles, slumping back down. Jiraiya levels with her a quite concerned look.

“You know we’re trying really hard to make that not happen right?” He tries, but it falls flat.

There is nothing they can do to prevent the third war if Shimura has his mind set on it.

“Doesn’t matter, unless you kill Shimura today it’s going to happen. He’s an oni.” Is it perhaps a bit too far to call him a demon, no, Tsuyuko thinks her dislike is justified and he deserves it.

“If it were that easy kid you know Orochimaru would have done that by now.” Jiraiya doesn’t mince his word, he pins her with a look that she hasn’t the energy to try and interpret.

“Yea, yea, on with the story.” Tsuyuko waves him off, they can talk about Shimura later, hopefully when they have an actual plan to end his life.

“Brat. Okay, okay. It’s not a nice story Tsuyuko.” He warns. Tsuyuko raises her brow.

Maybe Jiraiya is actually stupid.

“It’s pertinent information to my birth and thus it is relevant to me, no matter if it’s awful.” She informs him before taking another sip of her tea. Jiraiya sighs.

“You are truly Orochimaru’s kid. Anyway- one of those shinobi is obviously Suyuri, who was also the only one to survive. The commander of the faction of Iwa that took them took an interest in Suyuri.” Tsuyuko raises her brow at the inflection that is placed on the word interest.

It’s a peculiar inflection, meaning Jiraiya has changed the word to be more friendly. But she doesn’t need friendly. He’d already warned her that it wasn’t a nice story and thus she knows what he is implying.

“By the way you say interest I’m going to assume you mean he assaulted Suyuri-san.” She sets her tea aside having lost the desire to finish it now that it has reached room temp. Jiraiya grimaces, still trying to preserve her and Minato’s childhood innocence it would seem, and then finally he nods if a bit hesitant.

“He did. The commander was your biological father.” Here he pauses, letting that information sit in. Tsuyuko blinks slowly.

That... could pose to be a problem.

“Ah. Explains my earth nature then. Is he dead?” She hopes he is. Tsuyuko already has a dad, she doesn’t need or want another one. Especially not one that already sounds like scum.

“He’s dead. Suyuri with the help of one other shinobi wiped out the entire platoon. It killed the other survivor and Suyuri fled the scene.” There is another implication here that she doesn’t miss.

Suyuri fled alone, not with the bodies of her teammates.

“Smart. Sad that the dead couldn’t be returned to their families.”

“Happens a lot in turbulent times, but I agree it is sad.” Jiraiya agrees with her, he finishes his own tea. Briefly standing to take both his empty cup and her mostly finished cup to the sink.



“So what happened next?” Tsuyuko questions when he returns.

“Suyuri made it to Hirofu. Where you were then born, it was the closest Suyuri could get to Konoha following the escape. From there letters were sent and two teams were sent, one to survey the damage done to Iwa and another to Hirofu to tend to Suyuri. I and Sakumo were part of that team.” Tsuyuko doesn’t ask why they were a part of that team and not the other.

“Oh.”

“So you knew about me to some extent for my entire life.” Tsuyuko hesitates. Because that means it's more likely that Suyuri knew about her this entire time. To no surprise that makes her feel worse.

“Yea. Sorry kid.” Jiraiya apologizes again. Tsuyuko bites her lip.

“No.. It’s okay, you were doing your job- it probably would have been a bad idea for word to get out that an Iwa bastard was training to be a Konoha shinobi. That’s why I was left in Hirofu, or a part of the reason.” She refocuses the narrative. Back to the topic at hand.

Her abandonment.

“Smart kid. Suyuri wanted to bring you back, but ultimately the timing was too telling. It would be easier to pass you off as her sister’s child then four years later come get you for the academy. But then the unexpected happened.” Jiraiya crosses his arms over his chest. Tsuyuko sits up, she has to suppress a horde of memories that she tried not to think of.

“Plague.” She whispers. As memories of diseased and dying swarm to the forefront no matter how hard she tries to push them down.

“Plague. Hirofu was wiped off the map, with just you as a survivor.” Jiraiya reaches across the counter to pat her head, the gesture grounding, it reminds her that she is not there anymore. Tsuyuko takes a deep breath or as deep as she can manage with how congested she still feels.

“When did you all realize I was Suyuri-san’s daughter?” Tsuyuko questions to clear her thoughts of death and loss. Jiraiya pulls his hand away and sits back, he hums before answering the question.

“Suyuri knew as soon as they saw you, but she kept it to herself. With no viable reason to claim you that could work without raising

suspicion, it was still safer for you to remain an orphan. Sakumo realized the first time he met you that day you were with Tsunade. You look a lot like Suyuri in the face, sans the hair that comes from your maternal grandfather's side, Suyuri's father had hair like that." Jiraiya tells her, although he leaves out a part of the answer.

"Huh.. you also never fully answered my question." Tsuyuko of course isn't going to let him get away with that.

"I knew there was a chance you'd be among any survivors when Orochimaru was sent, and when I met you I realized. Had I been in the village beforehand I would have known sooner." Jiraiya admits, he rubs the back of his head.

Tsuyuko isn't surprised in the slightest. Offended? A bit, but surprised, no.

"Master spy, figures."

"I'm not a master spy." He denies. Tsuyuko tries her best to level him with an unimpressed stare, she doesn't think it's super effective though since Jiraiya only grins.

"That's what a master spy would say, anyway- thank you for telling me this... It doesn't change my feelings right now, not really at the end of the day I was still abandoned no matter what the reasons were." It takes her a moment to articulate how she feels after being told this story. Jiraiya doesn't seem to judge her for it as he stands from the stool.

"I didn't think it would. You deserved the whole story, and Suyuri wanted you to know it but it isn't one they can tell." He says easily, Tsuyuko trudges off her own stool nearly tripping on the blanket she'd drug into the kitchen with her. Jiraiya's quick reflexes save her face smacking her face on the floor.

"No, I imagine it's probably been just as traumatizing for Suyuri-san as it has been for me, just for different reasons." She manages after taking a breath.

"Yea. Alright kid, finish up your tea and get back in bed." Jiraiya ruffles her hair one more time, if she wasn't sick she'd be upset with him for floofing up her hair unnecessarily but frankly right now it doesn't matter.

"Be safe on your mission Jiraiya-san." She commands, Jiraiya rolls his

eyes.

“Always am, but thanks.” Departing in a puff of smoke a second later.

Tsuyuko finds no further point for standing in the kitchen and heads back to her room to sleep the rest of her annoying cold away. Her sheets smell like sweat and her main comforter is slightly damp from said sweat. She purses her lips- what an absolute disgrace. Like clockwork she turns on her heel, heading straight out of her room and down the hall to Orochimaru's room.

Without missing a beat she falls face first into the bigger bed and falls asleep.

### Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the love on the last chapter!

I hope this chapter helps clear a few things up, as well as settles some of the air around Tsuyuko's mother. Thank you for reading!

<3

Much love, Vee

# Getting better and going forward...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

There is a Tsuyuko sized lump in his bed. He isn't even surprised at this point. Orochimaru sighs, turning the light on dim, walking fully into his room and shutting the door behind himself. Then he dumps his weapons pouch on the side table instead of the bed like he would if there wasn't a Tsuyuko sized lump curled under the sheets and spread.

"Chichi?" The lump grumbles, shifting the covers to the side. Tsuyuko emerges after a moment her hair has come out of the braid she usually sleeps in and resembles overgrown underbush. Orochimaru flicks the bedside lamp on.

"Who else would I be?" He challenges as he takes a seat on the bed to unwrap his ankles. Tsuyuko blinks slowly, a few times much like a cat, it takes further clarity a few minutes to settle in.

"Fair point." She mumbles, slinking over to him to lay her head on his shoulder. Orochimaru doesn't hesitate to check her fever with the back of his hand against her forehead and neck.

She's not as warm as she was this morning, good.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired, head hurts." Tsuyuko grumbles into his shoulder. Orochimaru sighs, so not all better then.

"Another round of medication after dinner, perhaps that will do the trick."

"Maybe... I hate being sick." She complains as if it will make her get better any quicker. He rolls his eyes, patting her head absentmindedly.

"Dinner is a few hours off still, go back to sleep."

"M'kay." Tsuyuko crawls back over to what has become her spot, Orochimaru watches in barely veiled amusement as she face plants the bed and pulls all the covers back over her head.

What a ridiculous child.

It takes a few more days until she is recovered enough to participate in team training. By the third while she is arguably better her stamina is still shot to hell so Orochimaru insists that while she can join them for team training she cannot participate. Tsuyuko finds this arrangement annoying. But she does however reluctantly follows his orders, it will offer her a chance to observe her teammates and learn their weak points. While she would hopefully never need to utilize their own weak points against them it is good to know for the success of their missions.

Nawaki is a natural leader, he is charismatic and kind, humble and willing to learn. Himura is quiet, a stark contrast to both herself and Nawaki who according to Orochimaru never seem to stop talking. But he struggles to think for himself. Tsuyuko wonders what his life was like, as the third son of the Hyuga clan head, younger brother to the prodigy twins Hiashi and Hisashi, to make him be so reserved. Himura doesn't have the caged bird seal as far as she knows, but she doesn't know what being the third son will mean for his position in the clan. The unknown is a concerning concept, one they will have to work with. Luckily Himura seems intent on following Nawaki so he can't be that bad.

Tsuyuko takes notes, on their forms, on their interactions both with sensei and with her even though she cannot participate just yet. Her teammates are kind, courteous, and curious in an innocent way. It's not a bad combo for her teammates. She could be cautious, and callous for them. She could be the poison to their wine.

Finally after two more days of note taking and watching, Tsuyuko is cleared for training. Her body is still weak from being sick so she has to build back into it over the next few days. It's not perfect but it is better than sitting on the sidelines. There is only so much contemplation she can do.

Tsuyuko buries her face in Nawaki's back, they haven't been at training very long this morning and she's already exhausted. Curse her still recovering body. Thankfully Nawaki doesn't seem bothered as he reaches over his shoulder to pat her head.

"Sensei said to take it easy today, we can stop for a bit if you need a

break Tsuyuko-senpai.” Himura walks over to join them, Tsuyuko turns her head ever so slightly to regard their other teammate.

Himura for being the only one who’s actually done the majority of the exercises requested of them this morning doesn’t appear to have broken a sweat. Not even his long dark hair shows signs of sweat build up. It’s a bit offensive how perfect he still looks after the morning they’ve had. A few d-ranks that were simple enough they hadn’t required Orochimaru to interfere, followed by the absolute mundanity that was going over their current skill sets and exercises. The highlight of the entire morning was Nawaki’s utter incompetence with his tanto.

Eventually he’d figure it out, until then it is quite funny to her to watch him be so awful with it. Nawaki had a reputation during the academy that was much like Minato’s just minus the prodigy status. He could easily pick up new skills, adapt and improvise on the spot. A very useful skill set for any shinobi truly. However, when one is able to just be naturally good at most things with minimal effort it could lead to arrogance.

A fact Orochimaru often reminds her of. The thing is though, outside of medicine and poisons, she knows she is not naturally gifted. She knows her prodigy status is one that is the result of another lifetime’s knowledge and her ability to be rational. Tsuyuko knows her strengths, but more importantly she knows her weaknesses.

Inoichi often told her she was oddly self-aware for someone so damn stubborn. She more often than not ignored his input.

Himura interrupts her train of thought as he shoves a canteen at her. She pulls away from Nawaki to take the water canteen held out in front of her.

“How are you not sweaty?” Tsuyuko grumbles, carefully unscrewing the lid and habitually checking for poisons. Not that she thinks her teammates would be silly enough for something of the sort, it is however a good habit to have. Himura blinks, slow and owlshly, as if perhaps he thinks she’s joking.

She’s not.

“We haven’t exactly been doing hard work.” He counters after a moment. Tsuyuko sticks her tongue out at him, sharing a look with Nawaki. She decides she isn’t going to argue with him and instead chugs the water.

“Are you sure you are feeling alright?” Nawaki asks once she’s finished chugging the water. Tsuyuko hands the now empty jug back to Himura.

“Yea, I’m fine.”

“Okay, lunch?”

“Lunch.”

Orochimaru finds his three students at the estate after his irritating meeting that morning with his own former sensei. Something about ‘perceived hostility’ between him and Sakumo from some chunin who’d seen them sparsely interacting at the missions desk when they both happened to be turning in their genin’s reposts. Admittedly he had drowned the majority of the lecture out when he realized the topic matter was hardly relevant to him, he had never been the nice to others member of his team. A trait he was sure Tsuyuko was already starting to pick up or already shared with him.

She was nice to the people she liked. Most of the time. Of course there was also whatever was going on with her friendship with the Yamanaka heir. Like he said, she was nice to the people she likes most of the time.

Nawaki and Tsuyuko appear to be sparing of some kind while Himura mediates the match. He has absolutely no idea who is winning or what base of combat they are using as it really seems like the ten and twelve year old are flailing about with no merit.

“What are you two doing?”

“Sparing, obviously.” Tsuyuko lifts her head up to quip.

Orochimaru levels her with an unimpressed look. “Not like that. Match end, you two need to work on your forms.”

“We weren't sparing for serious.” Nawaki tells him, as if that much wasn’t obvious, Tsuyuko however just sticks her tongue out at him.

“Did the three of you manage to get any training done while I was otherwise occupied today?” Based on their appearance he is leaning towards yes, but one can never be so sure.

“Yup!” Tsuyuko chirps, the boys nod their heads.

“Good, tomorrow after morning training we will be hitting the mission desk. I think it is time for your first official mission outside of the village.” He tells them easily. Nawaki and Himura's interest have piqued, but his daughter bites her lip. Uncertainty clear upon her face, but more so fear than anything else.

He dismisses the boys, they leave with quick goodbyes and tentative excitement at the concept of leaving the village. Orochimaru reminds them to get a good night of sleep and to meet at their usual time and place in the morning. Tsuyuko doesn't move from her spot until they are both gone, she doesn't move until he steps into her space completely. She stumbles into his legs, burying her face in his side.

Orochimaru rests his hand on her head. But she doesn't look up at him like she usually would.

“Tsuyuko?” He picks her up when she doesn't immediately respond. Orochimaru carries her inside.

“What.. what if..” She whispers into his shoulder the second they've entered from the back door, barely lifting her head so it's but a muffled whisper against his jounin blues. He doesn't need her to clarify what sort of what-if she's asking about. Orochimaru knows why she is afraid.

“Do you trust me Tsuyuko?” He questions carefully, Tsuyuko lifts her head all the way eyes wide if appalled by the question.

“Of course I do!” She all but yells, he has absolutely offended his daughter. Orochimaru rolls his eyes at her tone.

“Good. Now go check your pack before dinner.” He sets her down at the base of their hall, ruffling her already mused bangs as she pouts at him. Tsuyuko huffs but luckily does as she is told hurrying down the hall once he pulls his hand away.

Orochimaru hums as he heads to the kitchen, he puts together a quick dinner for the three of them. Minato wonders in some time later ink stained finger tips. At least he will have something to keep himself preoccupied with while they will be out of the house. Tsuyuko ambles into the kitchen some thirty minutes later already changed into her pajamas. That will do just fine.

They eat dinner together, the children pass their usual conversation



around. Minato tells them about his day working with Kushina on fuinjutsu, Tsuyuko tells him about Nawaki's apparent utter failure with his tanto. Overall it is a quiet and easy meal. Orochimaru takes it upon himself to clean up when everyone is done, sending Minato off to shower to try and remove the ink stains from his fingertips and sending his own daughter off to early bed.

Tsuyuko is of course still awake when he passes by her door after putting everything away in the kitchen. Orochimaru sighs gently pushing the door frame open, leaning against the door arms crossed. She doesn't even look sorry when she glances up at him from whatever project she is currently crafting in her lap.

"You need to go to bed."

"I'm not tired." She protests, pouting rather dramatically at him. Worry and fear are still evident upon her face, so it must be anxiety then keeping her awake. Orochimaru pushes off the door frame walking fully into the room he sits on the foot of her bed.

"Tsuyuko."

"I'm sorry. I trust you, I do.. But.." Tsuyuko trails off. She bites her lip looking away from him.

Orochimaru places his hand on top of her project. "I know. I will do everything in my power to prevent that from happening."

"Promise?" She hesitates, knowing exactly what she is asking of him. Because as shinobi they shouldn't make promises like this. It was dangerous. He reaches out cupping her cheek in his hand and redirecting her face so she is once again looking at him.

"I promise." But as her father, he knows it's what she needs right now. Tsuyuko's lip wobbles, and tears fill her eyes. Slowly she nods, accepting his word for truth.

"Now, go to bed, child." He stands taking the small project and setting it aside. Tsuyuko nods her head laying back against her pillow. Orochimaru pats her head one last time for the night. He turns off her bedside lamp and shuts the door on his way out.

In his own room he checks over his own packs and weapons making sure everything is in order for their upcoming mission. Once everything is sorted he settles for the night. Making plans and contingencies just in case.

Everything will be just fine. He won't let anything happen to them.

## Chapter End Notes

Apologies for the slightly shorter chapter this was kinda filler-y but now we are officially at the start of a new arc... i think lol

Thanks for reading!

Also thanks for all the love on the last chapter <3

# We're nothing but collateral to him...

## Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

~..~

There is half a corpse at her feet, blood staining across her palms and face. Tsuyuko stares at the half corpse, vision faltering as chakra exhaustion seeps into her bones. Nawaki's grip on the back of her shirt is white knuckled, Himura crouching at her other side, almost fighting for each breath as he pants. The blank porcelain anbu mask held in his hands marks a horrible realization.

They shouldn't have had to fight this battle.

Orochimaru is livid in front of them, his back turned as he guts the other assailant alive. Between the three of them and their sensei is an anaconda sized summons, it's large head leering over Orochimaru's shoulder just waiting to devour the bodies.

Her hands shake. Legs tremble. She summoned that snake, and now she could feel the aftermath of such a feat.

They're alive because of her.

The last shinobi falls to a heap at Orochimaru's feet just as Tsuyuko takes a staggering step back from the corpse at her own feet, collapsing to her knees a second later Nawaki sinking down with her. Orochimaru all but spins on his toes to face them, covered in a splatter of blood that does not suit him. He steps around the summon ordering it to eat the bodies leave no remains, the large snake doesn't have to be told twice tail wrapping around one body and fangs sinking into the other disappearing in a puff of smoke to share the spoils with their hatch mates. Nawaki pats her shoulder, seemingly unaware how the grass twists around his toes. Honestly Tsuyuko doesn't think anyone else sees it, of course she's the only one staring at her teammates toes.

"Injury report." Orochimaru snaps, biting concern at the back of his teeth. Himura switched into autopilot reporting the obvious injuries the three have taken, she confirms as her vision blurs, as the ground wobbles and stomach churns.

She'd just killed someone. The doctor inside her mourns, an entire oath down the drain. The shinobi medic has just passed their biggest hurdle. Tsuyuko wants to throw up, while she'd always known that one day it would come to this, that she could not promise to do no harm here... the doctor inside her mourns the lives just ended. It takes her entire will power to push the bile back down her throat, to take a deep breath, to steady her heaving lungs. They could have died, this won't be the last time they stare death in the face, she cannot afford to mourn those that had fully intended to harm them. She has to be a medic, has to be a poison master, she cannot be a doctor on the battlefield not in this world. Not in this era.

Not with another war still brimming on the horizon. Not when she has people to protect and loved ones to return to.

"Tsuyuko?" Orochimaru crouches to her level, warning yellow and green meat. Tsuyuko leans into Nawaki's steady hand, she forces air to move through her lungs taking a long deep breath.

"I'm... we're okay sensei." She reassures, knowing he'll demand answers when they get home, knowing they aren't safe to give here.

They have to tell Nawaki and Himura now.

The sannin hums, pulling his canteen from his back bag and a rag. Gently he wipes the blood off her face. *You did well.* His eyes say without words. She bites her lip looking between her teammates, her friends. Nawaki smiles, a bright reassuring thing, affirming the statement of okay. Himura nods along.

"Good, our mission is finished, it's time to go home." Orochimaru helps them all back to their feet, they'd faced a jounin level shinobi and survived. Their actual mission had ended only hours prior, but it felt like a lifetime ago now. The reminder breathes a third wind under their aching feet.

It's time to go home.

Orochimaru's team survives their first official out of village mission. There are no incidents worthy of report. And while he probably should mention that Tsuyuko can now fully summon small to medium sized snakes from Ryuchi cave, he doesn't necessarily find that detail important information to share. For now it will remain a team secret.

Just like the blank mask ANBU Tsuyuko killed utilizing the aforementioned summoning.

Out of the official record at least, Orochimaru isn't so stubborn that he'd refuse to tell Hiruzen-sensei when his old teacher had been very clear that he was not the ones behind those agents going after the next generation. When he'd given him explicit permission to take out any such agent he perceived to be a threat. He would tell sensei to add more fuel to the bonfire he's been building under Shimura's feet since the elder tried to poach him all those years ago, since Tsuyuko told her of the story she knew - of what was supposed to become of him.

But it wasn't needed on the official report, not the one that becomes public records, not the one that council of elders has to see. It was safer for his students for him to not include those details.

Orochimaru leans against the doorframe of his daughter's room, Tsuyuko is sitting on the floor with her teammates quietly telling them her secret. Nawaki looks like the entire thing is going to give him stomach problems while Himura is only slightly more expressive than normal. Tsuyuko for once is stark serious, any sign of her usual playful attitude gone.

This is a matter of life and death, she is treating it with the care it deserves.

He leaves her to it. If the boys have questions for him they know to bring them to him. For now he knows she can handle herself. Orochimaru checks the laundry before heading to the kitchen to make coffee and snacks for the genin.

...

"So... you died, but before that you read about us... but we were dead and sensei was bad." Nawaki hesitates, Tsuyuko pulls one of her bigger knit plushies off her bed and hands it to him to hold. Himura is quiet beside Nawaki, and in turn gets a blanket thrown over his lap.

Neither look well, and really who would blame them. Their teammate is telling them a tale that by all means should be impossible.

"Yes. But sensei isn't bad and I'm not letting either of you die." Tsuyuko confirms, more than anything she reassures. Because she has no notion of letting either of them die. She's very much like to grow old with her teammates despite the war that is coming and the future hardships they'll face.

“How long has... ROOT.. been following you?” Himura asks, his face sours as he speaks the name of the organization that had sent assassins after them on what should have been a quick and easy first out of the village mission for their team.

“For sure since I became sensei’s student, but probably as long as I’ve been in the village. I wasn’t actively looking for them until I graduated from the academy.” Tsuyuko brings her knees up to her chest, she can faintly hear the washing machine in the background and the sound of coffee beans being put through the grinder in the kitchen.

Realistically she knows they’re safe here, but... it didn’t hurt to double check.

“What do we need to do? How can we help?” Nawaki gets straight to the point then, all reservations gone. His usually innocent, naive expression is replaced by one that is steel cut and lead laced. For the first time Tsuyuko sees the Senju in him, sees the imprint of his great uncle, the lineage of his grandfather.

When the day came, it would be neck and neck between him and Minato on who got chosen to replace the next Hokage. Because unless something happens to one of the sannin, Tsuyuko doubts Minato will end up at the Yondaime in the current ongoing path. Not that it mattered to her in which order the line went.

If you asked her, Minato being appointed Hokage at twenty-four was a terrible idea, his brain wouldn’t even be fully developed then. Why the hell did anyone think that was a good idea?

“I don’t have an answer right now... Sensei and the other sannin are planning something, but it’s going to take time and I don’t know what they’re planning. For now, the best we can do is keep each other and ourselves alive to fight.”

“So we train, we get stronger, we fight when the time comes. Himura?”

“I have no objections to any of this.” Himura agrees, sitting back, reserved really. He doesn’t remove the blanket on his lap.

“So.. you both believe me?”

“Yea, why wouldn’t we? You’re our teammate, and besides you aren’t a liar. Does Minato know?” Nawaki is perhaps too good for the world.

Tsuyuko bites her lip at the question.

They believe her. They really believe her.

“No.. I’ll tell him at some point, but not until he needs to know.” One day she knows realistically she’ll have to tell Minato the truth, but... today or any day soon is not the day right now. While it's not that she doesn't think he can handle it, she knows that once he knows the amount of danger he's in will increase tenfold because he won't mind his own business.

As Jiriaya's student he is in a safer position for the time being than she's in as Orochimaru's student. So for now, he is better left in the dark. If he wants to hold that against her later, then she'll deal with the consequences of her choices when they arise.

“Fair enough.” Thankfully her teammates don't seem like they'll rat her out either.

“You both can stay here tonight so we can finish writing our mission reports, let's go pester sensei to make dinner.” Tsuyuko stands, knowing that the longer she sits still the worse she'll worry. There is nothing they can do right now.

They have to get stronger.

It's all that's left for them to do.

Danzo was ready to swing the executioner's blade, he didn't care that they were children, didn't care that they were leaf shinobi. To him, the three of them are just a pillar between him and what he truly wants. Orochimaru. If they're gone, it would be easier to turn Orochimaru against the village. They're just pieces on the board. Collateral damage.

“Sure, honestly I'll sleep better knowing the two of you are safe. Think we can convince sensei to make tonkatsu?” Nawaki stands shifting the plush under his arm and hauls Himura up next in a swift movement. Himura sighs, wrapping the blanket around his shoulders. The small gesture of care over her creations warms the inside of her chest ever so slightly.

“Easily. Come on.” Tsuyuko leads them to the kitchen.

Orochimaru is sitting at the island with his coffee, he raises a single brow at them, gesturing loosely with his free hand. “Sit at the table to

write your reports, leave out the details about the blank mask ANBU and Tsuyuko's new skill. Tsunade called, she'll be working late at the hospital so Nawaki and Himura tonight you'll both stay here."

No one protests.

Orochimaru doesn't leave the manor until Jiraiya has returned with a sleeping Minato drooling on his shoulder. While he may still be upset with his fellow, it doesn't stop him from smirking at the picture.

"Who's soft now?" He bites out, sharper than intended but it doesn't seem to bother Jiraiya. The toad sage grins.

"Still you, I sensed all three of your brats before I even got to the gate. How was your mission?" The jovial smile is nothing but a farce, one that he sees through all too well. Orochimaru hums.

"I'll tell you later, preferably with Tsunade and without the kids. Are you leaving for any reason tonight?" They were still a team, keeping them in the dark the new development would do neither of them any good. Jiraiya nods, adjusting the sleeping genin in his arms ever so slightly.

Minato does not stir, unlike Tsuyuko he is not a light sleeper and would more likely than not be asleep until daylight.

"No, I have a manuscript to work on and a mission report to review. Are you heading out?" Jiraiya informs.

"I am, I shouldn't be gone too terribly long."

"I'll keep an eye on the kids."

Orochimaru leaves then, the kids will be safe while he is gone. The tale tell sign of seals activating behind him sound, no one keyed in would be getting into that house anytime soon.

...

His meeting takes longer than he'd anticipated resulting in Orochimaru not returning until sunrise. He is however very surprised to find that all four genin are awake and in the kitchen with Jiraiya supervising from the table. There is a cup of black coffee sitting on the



table waiting for him it seems. Orochimaru sighs walking over quietly, as it doesn't seem the children have noticed him just yet, he'd like to see how long that takes. He passes a scroll from sensei to Jiraiya silently. The other accepts it without a word tucking it into his haori.

Tsuyuko has commandeered a chair to stand on while she apparently pours batter into the skillet. Her back is turned to them, as is Minato's as he stands next to his sister but the way he'd lifted his head when Orochimaru sat down lets the snake summoner know that Minato has at least realized he's back. Briefly he wonders how ingrained Minato's sensor skills are, a question to file away for another time.

Nawaki seems to be cutting up fruit that wasn't in the house last night, while Himura cleans up behind them all. Orochimaru takes a long sip of his coffee. At least they are being considerate of the space.

Tsuyuko pokes Minato in the face. "Grab the plates."

"You didn't answer my question." He pouts but does as instructed anyway. Tsuyuko shakes her head at the other genin, Orochimaru finds their entire interaction extremely on point for them. Jiraiya snickers beside him.

"Massive drain of chakra at first, now the plates. Chichi is back, it's time to eat." Tsuyuko tsks at the blond. So she had realized he was back then. Nawaki looks up from the fruit head instantly on a swivel until his eyes land on Orochimaru.

He levels the pre-teen with a simple raised brow. It seemed as if they still needed to work on Nawaki's sensor technique.

"When did sensei get back? Sensei is everything okay, you were gone a long time." Nawaki rambles, scooping up the bowl of cut fruit and bringing it over to the table. Himura throws a few scraps into the compost pot before grabbing everyone a set of chopsticks. Both his older students sit down at the table making sure to leave room for Minato and Tsuyuko who are now whisper bickering at the stove while Tsuyuko plates whatever it is she has made.

"Everything is fine Nawaki-kun, nothing to be concerned about. Do the two of you need help?" He manages without a long suffering sigh, really it was perhaps too early for their combined antics. Especially since he's now pulled another all nighter and would really like to sleep.

"No, we're good. I made pancakes. Minato, bring Chichi and Jiraiya-

san their plates first, Nawaki you forgot to grab the juice from the refrigerator.” Tsuyuko gracefully spins around on the stool to command. Minato rolls his eyes grabbing three plates, as the sole kunoichi of the group turns back around to shut the stove off and hops down grabbing the remaining three.

Nawaki scrambles back up to grab the juice from the fridge, orange juice it seems that Orochimaru once again did not remember buying.

“Tsunade stopped by earlier, she brought the fruit and the juice.” Jiriaya tells him, reaching for his own coffee to drink. Not black like Orochimaru’s now almost empty cup.

“Ah. Did she do post mission check-ups?” He asks just as plates are set at the table.

“She did, ordered a rest day and then said they’d be good to resume tomorrow.”

Minato takes his seat next to Jiriaya after handing Himura a plate of pancakes. Nawaki is back before Tsuyuko who appears a second later setting the remaining plates down in front of the two blond genin. She takes one look at the spot left for her, scowls before promptly setting her plate closer to his. Orochimaru rolls his eyes, knowing good and well he is about to have a child in his lap for the duration of breakfast. By the tired look etched upon her eyes he is willing to wager she hadn’t slept well last night.

“Chichi...” Tsuyuko half whines, turning a warning green that has softened to a deep pout upon him. He can only sigh.

“Just this once.” Her grin is small, but triumphant as she pushes her chair closer to his than should be allowed. Tsuyuka finally sits down and instantly slumps her entire body into his side.

“Enjoy the food.” She says with a yawn and small smile. Orochimaru pats her head, ignoring the grin Jiriaya is throwing at him. He cannot help that Tsuyuko is an absolutely ridiculous child, who manages to eat her entire pancake in one bite before slumping even further into his side and promptly falling asleep at the dining table.

“Sensei, Tsuyuko-senpai is asleep.” Nawaki points his chop stick in her direction, mouth full of food. Completely undignified.

“I am aware, eat your breakfast Nawaki-kun.”

“You get used to it kid, brat loves to fall asleep at the table. Thanks for the food kids. I have some work to do so don’t give Orochimaru too hard a time.” Jiraiya teases, having seemed to have devoured his entire plate almost as fast as Tsuyuko had. Truly absurd behavior. Minato seems almost appalled by it, the poor boy’s face scrunched in bright concern.

“Sensei?”

“Script work today kid, I’ll be back after lunch. Ask Orochimaru about the thing.” Jiraiya stands, ruffles Minato’s hair. He takes his own plate as well as Tsuyuko’s back to the sink. Orochimaru turns his attention to Minato as Himura and Nawaki eat at a slower pace, his own food growing cold in front of him, he’ll reheat it later.

“Thing?”

“I have notes! But yea thing for now, it’s still theory.”

“Very well, we can discuss it after breakfast.” Minato nods, turning his attention to the other two boys. Orochimaru largely tunes the discussion out, nodding only when Jiraiya announces his departure. They’ll talk later.

He feels it will be quite the long discussion.

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Team Orochimaru

Chapter End Notes

I find writing missions boring unless the actual mission has something to do with the plot, since it didn't I hope yall enjoy the post mission disaster instead lol

The next chapter should feature some plotting on the sannin's part, and maybe some fun bits with Team Orochimaru and Team Hatake

Thank you all for being so kind and patient with me in the

comments, I am so glad you all enjoy the story so much!! <3

Idk how often I will be updating over the next few months, I am expecting my second child in September so life is fairly busy and chaotic rn , I do however promise that none of my fics are abandoned and I do in fact plan to update and finish all of them eventually as I can. This part of venomous has about three or so more chapters to go and then will continue in another story that features a bit of time skip, while I'm sure most would prefer it to stay one big fic as a writer that feel really chaotic to me and I'd rather break it up into parts I hope yall understand <3

Thank you for reading! I hope you all enjoyed the new chapter :)

Interlude ~

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Orochimaru does his own checks of his genin, once he deems them physically fine he releases the two boys. Of course after the entire ordeal he isn't surprised that both boys are hesitant to leave. Gently, despite himself really, he reaches out resting a hand upon each of their heads. Nawaki relaxes under the surprise contact, shoulders slumping and breath giving, Orochimaru pats his head.

"You both did well, now go home and rest. We will resume team training the day after tomorrow." Surprisingly Himura scoffs, but doesn't shake off Orochimaru's hand.

"How can you say that?" The third son, all but sold off to act as a guard to the Senju's second child, seems more a child now than he'd ever been allowed to before. Orochimaru meets the Hyuga boy's defiant glare straight on.

"I'm not sure what you mean Himura-kun, do you not think you did well?" He hopes his tone implies that a contrary thought really is out of place.

Because they did do well, especially for green genin who had to fend for their lives. Once more Himura scoffs. Nawaki reaches for his friend's sleeve but this gesture is brushed off, the movement also shakes his own hand off the boy's head. Orochimaru hums, removing his other hand from Nawaki's head and crossing his arms. Himura bites his lip before huffing.

"If it weren't for Tsuyuko we would have died. I nearly lost an eye." That he cannot argue with, well he could, but considering the genin's current disposition he doubts an argument will go anywhere. Whatever had he done to be saddled with such stubborn children. A rhetorical question he does not actually want answered.

Orochimaru considers his student for a moment. While he has no desire to argue, he will have to dispute such a notion from the boy's head. Independence is a good enough trait, reliance upon each other will get them further. He would very much like to see his genin make jounin one day.

"I see, but, is that not what teammates are for? To help up when we need it most." He challenges, not so surprisingly Himura looks as if he wants to protest more. However is cut off by Nawaki interjecting as he throws his whole body weight on the other boy, slinging an arm over the Hyuga's shoulders with little to no care.

"Sensei is right, come on Himura we can repay Tsuyu back later for saving us this time." Nawaki starts dragging Himura to the door. He does nothing to help his other student

"I suppose so... sorry sensei, we'll be going now."

"Bye sensei!"

Orochimaru lets them go without further discussion, he makes a mental note to go over the importance of teamwork again with them. But he'll let it sit a few days, see how this mission changes them, and adjust his teachings from there.

Late in the evening following a few days after his team's return from their first mission outside of the village, Orochimaru sits down with his own teammates for tea. All of the children have gone to bed, and they have set up in the upstairs office sealed for privacy and sound proofed so that none of what they discuss can be overheard by anyone trying to listen in. He recounts his genin's team mission after pouring them all some tea.

"He sent agents after you outside the village." Orochimaru isn't sure which of his teammates is more outraged by the fact, or if they're all just the same level of anger at this point.

Shimura made a bold move in sending agents after his students on their last mission, if he could not obtain them while in the village he was willing to take them outside of it. Either into his grasp or to the grave, it seemed not to matter to the elder. Orochimaru can feel his blood pressure rising at the thought. Knowing what he did now, knowing that it would eventually lead to a ploy to get him to work for Shimura, for ROOT. It didn't bode well for his students. Despite the fact that with what he knows now he'd never turn his back on this village, on his students, and his teammates.

Konoha has its fair share of issues, but it is still his home.

“It seems so. Tsuyuko took out the first, I gutted the second.” He admits, taking a long slow sip of his tea.

Jiraiya shifts leaning back to let one arm support his weight. “He probably won’t try again soon. Now was perhaps the best opportunity for foul play.” Which is not as reassuring as it should be.

Because no matter which way he looked at it, Orochimaru knows that Shimura will try again. This time he’ll send more or higher skilled assailants after his students. It was only a matter of time.

“Yes, while they are still relatively new and green. As if Tsuyuko wasn’t already pushing the limits of being an ordinary genin.” He doesn’t quite redirect the train of thought, only agreeing with the assertion Jiraiya has made. Tsunade scowls from his spot crossing arms over her chest.

“They’ll be green for a while in accordance with standard and mission intake, what stops him from just going again now.” She counters, a fair point really. One that would have merit if it wasn’t his team.

“If they were another team he would, but since they are mine and I know to be on the lookout for anything suspicious in nature he won’t risk losing too many agents. Not while he tries to figure out how to jumpstart another war.” Orochimaru sets his finished cup of tea on the table.

“I haven’t heard anything alarming so far about unrest.” Jiraiya shifts again, leaning on the table now. Orochimaru has the feeling that there is more to that statement. Nothing alarming, does not equal nothing at all. He’ll press the matter another time.

“It will come. Only a matter of when at this point.” He reminds them, perhaps a bit cold. But they of all people should not forget the times they live in.

“Hopefully it holds off until the kids are a little older.” Tsunade grumbles, even though she knows how unlikely that is. At most they’ll make it to chunin before the inevitable begins.

“We cannot afford to hope, not right now.” He hates having to be the realist. It made for terribly depressing conversation. Tsunade glares at him, having not needed the reminder.

“Don’t make me come across this table, Orochimaru. I will smack you.” She threatens, Jiraiya snorts, and he can only roll his eyes at

them both. For now they must wait.

Gather more evidence of Shimura's dark deeds, build up the pyre underneath the elders feet so that when it is time he burns to dust. A relic to be forgotten. Let him go down in history as the traitor he'd become.

Tsuyuko buries her face in Himura's back, yawning as she does it. It's far too early for this. The sun has barely kissed the tops of the trees. Who thought dawn training was a good idea? She did not consent to this horrible situation. Especially after barely sleeping the night before due to a recurring nightmare that only has gotten worse since their mission. Himura thankfully doesn't seem to mind being used as a pillow and support, Nawaki on the other hand has no issue laughing at her.

"Come on Tsuyuko-senpai cheer up, it's joint team training today. You get to see Shikaku-senpai." Nawaki pats the top of her head, laughing far too loudly for how early it is. He gets two sets of eyes glaring instead of one. At least Himura has her back.

"Nawaki I will poison your food." Truthfully she was already planning on doing that, but he didn't need to know it. Nawaki just laughs.

"Tsuyuko, why is your teammate so loud?" Shikaku grumbles as he walks up with Choza and Inoichi, he too seems plagued by the unfairness of this early morning training session as he rubs his eyes.

"Fuck if I know, I think he's broken. Morning Cho, Ino."

"Good morning Tsuyu. Nawaki-san, Himura-san." Choza smiles big and is full of cheer. Inoichi grumbles good morning but he too seems to be suffering from sleep loss.

"Morning." Himura intones politely and Nawaki beams.

"Good morning Team Hatake." Nawaki maintains his happy volume, Tsuyuko reaches over and pinches him in the arm. It's too early to be so loud. Of course the pinching does absolutely nothing and by the look of the dirty blond's face she can tell her teammate has committed to absolute terrorism against their peace and quiet.

Orochimaru appears a second later behind them, he seems more

irritable than expected. Minato is surprisingly with him, also looking like he would rather be asleep. Tsuyuko finally lifts her head enough to look at him. "Where is Hatake-san?"

"He got called away on a last minute mission with Jiraiya. I'll be overseeing all of your training today. For now start with warm ups, later I'll pair you off for sparring and one on one training with me." Tsuyuko groans.

It's going to be a long morning.

...

The long morning turns into three long mornings, as the other genin's teams jounin sensei's mission seems to continue on. Minato rubs his eyes with a long yawn barely keeping his head upright, Tsuyuko maintains her perch on the kitchen counter while Orochimaru cooks their breakfast. The snake sannin is by far the most alert and awake in the house.

"Chichi, when will Jiraiya-san and Hatake-san return?" She kicks her feet, making sure not to actually hit the cabinets below. The question is enough for Minato to pick his head up off the table to seek an answer. Orochimaru doesn't answer immediately, his attention focused on the pan in front of him. Bacon sizzles in the pan, nothing but ambiance to be drowned out.

"Not for another few days at the earliest." He informs them plainly a moment later, not bothering looking over his shoulder while continuing to tend to the stove. Tsuyuko nods, must be something important then. Minato on the other hand becomes more alert with the news.

"Is everything okay?" Minato's voice wobbles ever so slightly with worry. Despite being given no reason to worry. Orochimaru moves the bacon to a plate, checks the soup and pops the lid for the rice maker up before turning to look at Minato.

"As far as I am aware, everything is fine, just standard pop up missions for them. Today will be a rest day for the seven of you, I have some work that needs attending to in the lab." He tells them both easily, pulling plates down for food. Tsuyuko hops off the counter.

"Can I come?" She tugs at his jounin pants, Orochimaru's resounding sigh is far more fond than exasperated and she counts it as a win even

as three plates are being shoved into her hands to take to the table.

“If you must, don’t expect anything exciting.” He intones dryly, as if trying to emphasize how boring it will be. Tsuyuko thinks that he doesn’t realize she can always find something to re-organize and that will keep her busy.

She half tunes out Minato and Orochimaur’s conversation thinking of what area she wants to tackle first.

“I’m going to track down Kushina-san, see if she is up for working on fuinjutsu.” Minato tells them, Tsuyuko tunes back in for that, if only momentarily to look at Orochimaru to confirm a suspicion.

Her father ignores her look, keeping his eyes trained on Minato, slowly nodding his head before adding his own thoughts to the comment.

“She should be recovered by now from her ailment, but if she is not up for receiving visitors I have some theory for you at the lab Minato-kun.” He tells Minato easily, Minato nods his head slowly still groggy with sleep. Tsuyuko takes a bite of her rice, her own question confirmed.

Kushina now had the kyubi. Which meant they’d be announcing Mito-sama’s death of failing health soon. So they were going to try to keep whoever held the kyubi going forward a secret then. A terrible idea if you asked her, but since no one had, it didn’t matter what she thought on the whole thing. It wasn’t like she was friends with the other kunoichi.

“Hai, Orochimaru-san.” Minato chimes, only slightly showing how curious he is at the mention of more theory.

While Orochimaru may not have been a seal master on the surface like Jiriaya, he had an extensive library on the topic. One in which Minato’s own sensei apparently constantly raided. So it’s not that surprising that Minato would be curious. Orochimaru hums.

“Good, now eat your breakfast.”

No one has to be told that twice.

If Orochimaru is surprised by the hokage's appearance in the lab he does not show it. Tsuyuko thinks his reaction is lackluster at best, if he made a trip to see her at her place of work she'd be more excited. Impatiently she tugs on his pant leg, to which Orochimaru all but shoves her backwards.

"Settle down child, it is only Hiruzen-sensei. He's here for a report ." He intones soundly rather bored, the older shinobi snorts.

"I won't be long Tsuyuko-kun, wouldn't want to get in the way of whatever it is you two will be working on today." By the look on his face he knows exactly what her sensei is doing and has been told not to hint at it to her. Tsuyuko tries to not be offended by the notion.

Sensei was being rather secretive and selective this morning and she rather hated it. First the allusiveness about the mission Jiraiya and Hatake-san were on and now not telling her about his own work. Scratch that she is offended. Tsuyuko turns a pouty look to the Hokage.

"Sensei won't tell me what he's working on so I'm planning on working on the filing system in the storage room." In a way that will most certainly bother Orochimaru, she does not say but secretly hopes the message is received.

"I see, well I wish you the best of luck with your task then Tsuyuko-kun." Hiruzen-sama offers her a soft if mischievous grin.

"Thank you sir." She ducks her head, a polite half bow that earns a raised brow from Orochimaru as he hands off a scroll to his sensei. The old man chuckles before leaving without another word, a single puff of smoke where he'd been standing the only evidence of his departure.

Tsuyuko stares at the spot for a long unblinking second. "Huh.. that's not very tactile for the battlefield, so I guess there are some pros for my party trick."

"Don't mumble, and yes there are indeed some advantages to what you can do. Now I have to focus. Either make yourself useful elsewhere or be quiet while I work." Orochimaru barely looks up from the notes sprawled in front of him to respond. Tsuyuko once more tries to decipher them from over his shoulder but as they are written in a code she has yet to learn, whatever he's doing remains a mystery to her.

“Hai sensei, I’ll be in the archive room.”

“Very well, Tsuyuko, if I don’t like your reorganization I will make you redo it.” He tells her pointedly. Tsuyuko only grins as she gets up from the lab table.

“M’kay. Good luck with that!” She doesn’t wait for a response scurrying off to the archives to work.

As much as she’d like the hands-on experience of lab work, whenever Orochimaru got deep into his work there wasn’t much she could do or add to it. Which created a rather boring environment for her. Plus there was only so much peering over her dad’s shoulders she could do before he got annoyed with it. Not that she blamed him, having someone hanging over your shoulders while working on this was rather annoying. Something she’d rather like to tell the shadow that had stayed after the Hokage left. Instead she continues on her way, if the shadow had something to say to her they would.

Of course though they don’t, especially when the attempt to have Tsuyuko initiate conversation fails. Just because she’d noticed the ANBU tail didn’t mean she wanted to engage with the shinobi. Most of the time it would be fun to point out how obvious they were being, but not with this one. Not when she thinks she might know who this agent could be.

The amount of care the fox masked agent had shown in consideration of them when sensei and the other sannin had been away was more than any shinobi had given. A coincidence she couldn’t ignore. Tsuyuko ignores the shadow while she grabs a notebook and starts her self imposed task. Eventually her mother would get the memo that she has no desire and no reason to talk to her.

Some thirty minutes later she looks up from a stack of files and the label paper to find the shadow gone and left on the table next to her an inconspicuous note. Very carefully she sets her work down before reaching for the post-it. Tsuyuko leans against a filing cabinet and braces herself for whatever the note might make her feel.

‘Do you want to meet your brother?’

Her breath catches in the back of her throat, gasping ever so slightly as the realization finally catches up to her. Hatake Kakashi is her younger brother. They share a mother. Regardless that she’d probably never have any love for the woman who gave her away, she had a little brother who may one day need an older sister to keep him safe.

Tsuyuko bites her lip, tasting copper and ignoring it. She reaches for the pen she'd sat aside earlier.

Quickly scribbling her answer on the post-it, before she can change her mind.

'yes'

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading!

Happy to get this update out, bit of filler, bit of interlude type chapter, but still a chapter- I had my baby and have been adjusting to life with two kids, and it is quite the adjustment, so updates will still be inconsistent but I will update as much as I can as I can

There will most likely be a timeskip in the next chapter or one after that, I'm thinking this fic will also wrap up its arcs around chapter 25 and I will then start writing the second book of this series, so yea..

< 3

Please ignore any editing errors and typos, I've done my best but I am also sleep deprived and cannot be held accountable for any errors at this time lol

The only way that matters, trust must be earned...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hatake Kakashi is a little... baby, maybe toddler, thing.. Tsuyuko regards her little brother carefully. She vaguely remembers seeing him as a newborn except that was a while back. Of course she isn't entirely sure when a while back was exactly, before she got her teammates sounds about right but that information does nothing to help her figure out the age of the silver haired boy. The mini poison master in training has absolutely no idea how old her brother is or supposed to be and she's not about to ask. He's small though, that's for sure. Like her... Like she had been.

He blinks two wide gray eyes, staring at her a bit sleepily. Tsuyuko blinks back before turning an almost pleading look to the little boy's father. Frankly she has no idea what she is supposed to do with him. She liked kids, both before and now, but that didn't mean she had a penchant for dealing with them.

Sakumo quirks a small amused smile, plucking Kakashi off the ground as if the little boy weighs nothing, before plopping said boy down into her lap without a single word.

"He won't bite, although he may droll on you." Sakumo laughs sitting down on the ground across from her.

"Gross." Tsuyuko grumbles, carefully adjusting Kakashi to a more comfortable position to hold, he thunks his head against her shoulder and proceeds to stare at her.

One day he'd be an aloof shinobi, but right now he was just a helpless baby toddler thing. Tsuyuko stares back.

"Hi Kakashi-kun, I'm Tsuyuko." She whispers, holding him carefully. Not daring to do anything else.

True to what Sakumo had said, her brother does in fact droll on her but Tsuyuko finds she doesn't care too much about it. Kakashi is content to sit in her lap and amuse himself with a toy, leaving her to her own thoughts. She periodically glances at Sakumo who seems

content to just sit and watch his son play.

He'd seemed a bit worn after that mission with Jiraiya, once they'd finally returned that is. According to Inoichi, as soon as Sakumo had returned he'd given them a few days off from training so he could recover from his mission. Jiraiya hadn't been quite as lenient with Minato though and the two were up early doing whatever it is that they do. Then there was Orochimaru who had been so done with his prolonged stint managing seven genin that he declared the next few days time to work on individual skills while he worked in his lab. Tsuyuko had decided that the best way to spend this time was coming here. Not so much a skill, but it was a big step for her so it would do.

"Hatake-san, can I ask you a question?" She isn't sure what really sparks her to ask.

Really, it's not like she truly cares... but she did find it odd that it was him here instead of Suyuri. Sakumo appraises her slowly, he leans back on his hands.

"You can ask anything, but that doesn't guarantee an answer kid." He informs her easily. Tsuyuko nods, she expected that much. She does one last check of the home, to double check.

The Hatake home is smaller than her own, but just as lived in and loved. It's obviously a shinobi household, packs and weapons stowed in clever spots for quick convenience if the need ever arose for such a measure. There are multiple sets of shinobi sandals in the genkan that's sliding shoji door is either purposefully left open or is broken off the hinge for whatever reason. Regardless of all the obvious signs Sakumo is married and has a partner, the matriarch in question is missing.

"Where is Suyuri-san? I thought.." She trails off, Sakumo hums. Seeming to understand what she didn't want to say.

"That meeting Kakashi included seeing your mother." A thought that she wasn't sure how she felt about now. Did she even want to see her?

"Yea.."

"Suyuri didn't want her presence to interfere with the meeting." He tells her easily. The answer feels rehearsed or talked through. Obviously the couple had discussed the topic beforehand then. Tsuyuko bites the inside of her cheek.

The pit in her stomach deepened. She doesn't know how she feels about that. How she's supposed to take it. Even if she didn't know what she wanted from the situation, it would have been nice perhaps to see the woman again. Maybe then it would have...

"I don't... I don't hate her. She could have.. She doesn't have to hide from me." Tsuyuko fumbles over her words, trying her hardest to keep the bitter tones from her tongue. To keep her true feelings to herself. Sakumo only hums again, if she's been looking at his face she would have noticed the forlorn expression that momentarily crossed over his own face.

She would have realized that no one has asked the Hatake clan head how he felt about the situation. However Tsuyuko isn't looking at him, her focus is on Kakashi who has started to slouch in her arms.

"Can I ask you a question, Tsuyuko-chan?"

"How are you feeling about everything now? It's been some time since that night." Sakumo questions, he seems sincere enough. She knows it's a twofold issue. Because on one hand he's looking out for his son by making sure his sister won't develop any ill will. But also anything she says about the matter will not remain between them.

He would tell his wife.

Tsuyuko considers the question carefully. She considers the best way to answer. How she felt now complicated and ever so simple all at once. Because it was so simple, and yet her feelings were what made it complicated.

She felt no instinctual love for the woman who gave her up. Not like the love she felt for Orochimaru who had taken on the role of her dad without any qualm. Not like the sibling type love she felt for Minato or the protective love she felt for the boy in her arms. It was weird, when she thought of the woman who was her mother... she drew a blank. There was no semblance of love to be found. No semblance of wanting to develop a love or like either. When Tsuyuko thinks of Hatake Suyuri she feels nothing.

Not hatred, not love, nothing. Tsuyuko shrugs, it's the best answer she can give right now. Sakumo nods, he'll interpret that shrug however he deems fit. She gives Kakashi one more hug before carefully shifting him over to his father.

Tsuyuko offers Sakumo a polite bow. "Thank you for letting me come

over to meet Kakashi-kun. I need to go now, but maybe..." She trails off, surprisingly Sakumo smiles.

"You are welcome to come over and spend time with Kakashi whenever Tsuyuko-chan."

"Thank you Hatake-san."

"Sakumo is just a fine kid." Tsuyuko nods then quickly gathers her things, puts her shoes back on and waves goodbye to her brother before leaving.

Seeing Kakashi reminds her that she has a job to do. She has people to protect, and her brother deserves to grow up with both of his parents no matter how she feels about them.

The air in his lab is cold, without Tsuyuko's constant presence while he works it actually feels cold. His daughter was taking the day to spend time with her brother under the supervision of Sakumo. He sighs, his nerves are still frayed from the last several days, he couldn't focus on his work. Orochimaru stands, it will do him no good trying to work under these conditions. Perhaps he needed a rest day.

But first he needed to deal with his lurker. Orochimaru glances up from the notes that had long since blurred before him. He slightly tilts his head to the single entrance. "Jiraiya, I thought you were spending the day with Minato-kun in the library?"

Jiraiya grins as he steps out of the shadowed stairway, hands raised in a mock surrender. "Sensei popped in with a book he thought Minato-kun would find interesting. The two are conspiring in the tower now. He'd apparently rounded up Tsuyuko-chan and your other brats too."

Well that was an interesting turn of events.

"Why?" A suspicious one too. Jiraiya shrugs, as if he doesn't see how suspicious it is.

"Personally I think he's using them to avoid the small council." So not malicious then. Orochimaru hums, that did seem entirely possible for their teacher. It was well within the realm of believable behavior for him.

It was clever because his small council would never realize that he had an ulterior motive. The problem is Orochimaru himself is not fooled. Which begs the question: what did sensei really want from his students and Minato?

“Ah, and why are you here?” He snarks, pushing back against the feeling of distrust that lingers. Sarutobi-sensei was safe, he would not hurt Orochimaru’s students, but... well the snake summoner’s nerves were a bit frayed so distrust and fight are of course the first thing he pulls for instinctually.

“Let’s get lunch.” Jiraiya of course helps the matter none at all by evading the question. Orochimaru pins the other with a dry blank stare.

“I’m not paying.” He states evenly, standing after a moment. Jiraiya scoffs, rolling his eyes.

“Yeah, yeah. Come on.” Jiraiya all but pushes him out of the lab. Orochimaru makes his displeasure at being man handled none with a dark threatening look.

It is of course ignored. Because the next second his oaf of a teammate is clapping a hand on his shoulder and moving them to a new location. Orochimaru quickly takes in their surroundings when the smoke clears. But it is not the location that surprises him, it is who appears to be waiting for them.

“I see, well I do hope the children will be able to make due on leftovers tonight.” He grumbles, Jiraiya manages to look apologetic.

“Tsunade volunteered to check in on them.” He’s informed quickly. Ah, so it was going to be this sort of conversation. Long and private.

He really wasn’t looking forward to this. Not when he can guess the content of the meeting and how much he’s going to despise the answer. They’re going to have to re-evaluate their current plan, he just knows it. How disappointing then, he’d been rather pleased with the plan. Orochimaru sighs, he can already feel the exhaustion this is going to cause him to creep in as he walks over to the table. Jiraiya sits next to Sakumo, leaving the spot across from them for him. He sits, leaning back into the booth best to be comfortable for this.

“Let’s get started then.”

Sunset peaks the far horizon, light filtering in from the large windows that overlook the village begin to dim. Hiruzen sits at his desk reviewing a wayward scroll. All but one of his students' students have gone home. He observes the young girl sitting on the floor in front of his previously messily organized bookshelf, a few stacks of various folders and scrolls are sitting around her. Orochimaru's daughter looks occupied with her self imposed task but he knows she hasn't been focused for some twenty minutes or so now.

"Tsuyuko-kun?" He calls out softly in hopes not to startle the youngest of that year. Tsuyuko looks up immediately, almost as if she'd been waiting for him to speak directly to her.

"Yes Sarutobi-sama?" Except she blinks as if confused or caught before answering. A measured pause. Tsuyuko has mastered the appearance of an innocent naive child far too well he decides after a moment of observing the genin. If he were a lesser shinobi then he would have perhaps been fooled by the entire display.

Of course he is not, and in fact knows exactly where she would have picked up this particular and rather impressive skill. His former genin team had all mastered this act in some way, and he could see similar tactics from at least two of the three.

"I wasn't aware that the first's notes on botany were that interesting. You've been staring at that scroll for a while now, everything alright?" He feigns a chuckle, maintaining an amiable teasing air between them. Tsuyuko blinks again and then glances back to the scroll in her lap.

"Oh... The words blurred together a while ago I was thinking." She tells him after a moment of staring at the scroll. He hums in response, carefully standing from his desk to join the genin on the floor.

"I could tell, having trouble placing that scroll within your sorting system." He sits next to her. This seems to surprise her, if the attempt to conceal a startle is anything to go off of.

Hiruzen takes the scroll from her hand and carefully rolls the accord closed. Tsuyuko considers him for a moment before she responds.

"No, it can go with the rest of the Shodai's notes on random topics." She gestures loosely over to a bin labeled '*Assorted Shit: Shodai Addition*' and he nods, setting the scroll down in the bin with a few other items that fit that humorous title.

"Then whatever has your mind so occupied?" He stays sitting on the floor, a fact his aging joints do not agree with, but he feels it may be necessary for this particular conversation.

He's curious, really, about the secrets his students have been keeping from him, and he knows that while they don't want to bother him with whatever is going on... the genin before him must know he needs to know.

"Sarutobi-sama, do you think you're trustworthy?" Tsuyuko questions after a moment, she meets his gaze and never wavers as she asks such a daunting question. It's such an Orochimaru type question that he's not even that caught off guard.

She really has become her father's daughter.

"In what way?" He counters, part to see what she'll say and part because he wants to make sure he knows what sort of answer she's seeking.

"In the way that matters most." She answers without hesitation. As if her answer is the only one in the world. He hums leaning against the wall, glancing to the ceiling and activating the office's privacy seal. This conversation is not one he wants overheard. After ensuring it would remain between them he turns his attention back to the genin.

"I like to think I am, but tell me, what do you think?" She considers his answer, Hiruzen watches the cogs turn as she turns over what he's said. Tsuyuko really is far too expressive for a shinobi, she wasn't spy material that's for sure, but he knew she would be a talented medic and based on Orochimaru's reports of their progress her skill with poison will be unparalleled.

"I want to trust you, I want to believe you are trustworthy." She answers honestly, there is a hesitation that lingers at the end of her sentence with how she turns, looking away a brief moment to put the bin of assorted scrolls back on the shelf.

"But?" He intones, encouraging her to continue. Tsuyuko seems to look around the room for something, her eyes land on the seal etched into the ceiling. One only someone trained to see could spot. She takes a very deep breath before glancing back at him.

Her resolve shifts, eyes narrow, warning green glint like toxic sludge.

"You keep a very dangerous shadow. A shadow that makes a point to

try and hurt me.” For the first time that evening he is surprised by her answer. Perhaps he shouldn’t have been, but, by the pointedness of her remark she knows what he would very much like for no one to be aware of.

How she’s come to this knowing, he hasn’t the slightest clue. It was unlike Orochimaru to have outright told his student about Danzo. The watchers she and Minato had mentioned before should not have been enough of a clue, at least not for a regular shinobi. Demanding answers will get him nowhere, in order to gain the answers he must first have her trust.

A leader who’s subordinates didn’t trust them wasn’t a leader worth following.

“I see. I understand your hesitation then. Is there anything I can do to help gain back your trust?” The weight of the following stare speaks in volumes. But her answer is a soft whisper.

“I hope so.” Tsuyuko doesn’t move from her spot. He stands just to grab a wooden box off the top shelf of the bookcase. Hiruzen takes his previous spot, he opens the box and begins to set up the pieces.

“Let’s discuss what needs to be done now over a game of shoji.” She nods, wordlessly getting standing and walking over to grab the kettle he keeps by his desk.

While he sets the board she grabs a few more necessary items to make tea. Hiruzen watches her go about the task from the corner of his eye, he doesn’t think she’d try to poison him but it was better safe than sorry. Tsuyuko never acknowledges his watchful eyes and continues as if nothing has happened. A good thing he thinks, a step in the right direction. Hiruzen sits back once the board is set, with the next move now hers.

She walks back over about five or so minutes later, bringing to steeping cups with her. Tsuyuko offers one cup to him to which he takes without hesitation before she sits, almost immediately sipping the piping hot drink with ease.

“Should I check for poison?” He questions, keeping a bemused expression on his face. Tsuyuko shakes her head.

“That won’t be necessary today.” She smiles sweetly, quite amused by the question it seems.

“Noted, the board is set, I believe you are to move first.” He gestures with his free hand, not yet drinking from the cup. It’s far too hot for his taste currently, he’ll let it cool. Tsuyuko nods, taking another sip from her cup.

“So it seems.” She hums, setting her cup next to the board leaning forward to examine the pieces. It’s like looking back in time, a reflection of the past. Hiruzen can only chuckle.

“Whenever you’re ready then.” He sits back and takes his first sip from the cup.

Chapter End Notes

Eyyo, an update that I literally wrote over the last two weeks-ish. Wasn't quite sure where to start to get us where I am intending to go, but once i got the beginning bit figured out the rest came easily- even if it is a bit cryptic right now
But hey, who doesn't love secrets.

I probably won't get another update for this out before the new year but I will try my best too if I can :)

- Merry happy holidays everyone!

<3

A new day ahead - Trust and Hope

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“Whenever you’re ready then.” He sits back and takes his first sip from the cup.

Tsuyuko hums as she considers her play. For all her bravado she needed to be sure. This was more than just a simple match. It would be a turning point. She had to be sure it was the right decision. That there would be no room for human error. Of course that means her first move is simple, almost thoughtless but not senseless.

The first few rounds are passed in quiet contemplation on both sides. Until Tsuyuko takes another piece from the board, adding it to the small collection she’s gathered so far. Hiruzen-sama hums his approval. “Clever girl.”

She doesn’t smile at the praise like she usually would, instead she looks up from the board meeting his calculative gaze. For a moment it’s like looking at her own teacher, she sees now that’s where he got it from then. With that in mind there is no going back.

“Did you know that Hirofu was a testing ground?” She questions without holding back. Hiruzen-sama sighs, nodding his head slowly.

“Not originally no, but afterwards there was no denying what it was. But by that point too much time had passed and there wasn’t any proof.” He tells her ever so seriously. Tsuyuko hums. Not a great answer, but not really a bad one either.

“Do you trust sensei?” She takes the next opportunity to ask, hedging the conversation on a different course. Hirofu’s fate offers her no solace or answers.

“With my life.” There is no hesitation to his answer. Tsuyuko thinks if she could accomplish anything then she hopes that answer with such assurance doesn’t ever change. He plays his next move.

The match continues in silence for several more minutes. Until finally they’ve reached a stand still, Tsuyuko makes her decision.

“What would you say if I told you I died and was then reborn with my

past life's memories? And on top of that my memories include an account of this world's past and future." She sits up straight then, hoping to convey the seriousness of her own accusation.

Hiruzen startles, but not near enough for her to catch up on. All she sees is him pausing to think. To consider her question and statement. "I would hope you would feel safe enough to share with me what you could then. Is this why you asked if I considered myself trustworthy?"

"Yes. The information I have is dangerous, very dangerous and in the wrong hands it's devastating." She warns. The Hokage nods simply as if fully understanding and accepting that appraisal.

"I see. I understand now. May I ask you a question in turn, Tsuyukokun?"

"Of course."

"How old were you when you died?" For the type of question it is, much to Tsuyuko's surprise it is asked with such care. She considers the board between them, and considers the pieces collected on both sides.

It's a draw.

It takes a moment for her to collect an answer, the before wasn't quite so clear now. Those types of details the mind forgot even if the body remembers. Tsuyuko finds that she can't quite find an exact answer. Just probable, thereabouts theories. How old was she when she died? Others would have considered her to be young with a lot of life left to live, but that doesn't help pin down the age. How old was she when her body finally gave out? When incurable came and death destroyed? She pulls for a memory, but all that's left is pearly white noise. A moment lost to the void, forgotten over time.

Her death had not been worth remembering. It hadn't brought about anything joyful for her. Not like the stories she'd read. Tsuyuko cannot give him an exact answer.

"Somewhere between sensei and you. Honestly I didn't think that information was relevant to hold on to." She settles on, it's the truth. Why would she hold on to devastation like that? Her death was the end, and the beginning but those finite details hardly mattered now.

The Sandaime hums, considering her answer for a moment, he begins to clear the board. He responds soon after starting the task. "I see. I

suppose age hardly matters in the grand scheme of all we have learned.”

He seems like he believes her. She wants him to believe her.

“I guess not. So you believe me then?” Tsuyuko sits back, tucking her hands in her lap, her teacup empty and long abandoned next to her. Here the current Hokage stalls, she watches a look pass over his face she doesn’t yet understand.

For a moment she is afraid he thinks her a fool. But then he nods, simple and quick, dropping his voice to a whisper as he replies.

“I do, considering I know of another like you.” He tells her solemnly. Tsuyuko’s entire brain halts. Her whole worldview shifts for a single moment time stops. She can feel her heartbeat behind her ears, the static on her arm.

Another like you. The implication is not lost, there is someone else he knows that was reincarnated with their first life’s memories. She’s not the only one. She’s not alone in this. Even if this person knew nothing of this world, maybe, just maybe they knew about the world she once came from.

“Oh? There is another person in the village who was reincarnated with memories?” She asks, despite her best judgement, her curiosity is too much for her really. Surprisingly, he smiles.

“My wife. I think you should meet her. We can head there once you finish cleaning up this mess.” He gestures loosely to the scattered documents. Tsuyuko nods, quickly getting back to the task as he puts the board away.

While she clears away the mess he sits next to her and Tsuyuko quietly tells her story. It doesn’t take too long; he’s a good listener, saving questions and concerns for the end of each part. After she’s done telling her tale, there are a few more things to sort and put away at this point Hiruzen-sama returns to his desk and she allows her mind to momentarily wonder.

She wonders what type of person Biwako-sama is, and how much different she’ll be from what she remembered of the woman in the original story. Tsuyuko hopes that she’s kind. Perhaps it’s a good thing then she’ll soon find out.

Once their game is concluded it leaves him with much to consider. How to go forward from here? To think, all an old friendship has ruined and could continue to rot. Hiruzen knows without a shadow of a doubt that Danzo will not hear his earlier warning, and knows that the other has already tried to take what isn't his. So he must prepare for what he has to do now that the chips are down.

But first, he needs to make sure the child before him knows she has placed her trust safely with him.

"Tsuyuko-kun." He calls out once the last bin has been neatly tucked away. The small girl turns quickly to look at him, hair bouncing wildly around her shoulders with the movement. It seems her expressive nature still hasn't quite found itself controlled.

He thinks that perhaps it never will. Expressiveness wasn't necessarily a damnation for a shinobi. Fire was made up of bright flames after all and no one ever doubted how deadly it could be.

"Hmm?" She acknowledges simply.

"For now, what we've discussed lets keep to ourselves." He tells her expecting push back or concern, instead she surprises him once more. She simply nods without question.

"Good, now let's head out Biwako will have my head if I miss dinner again this week." He jokes, chuckling for good measure trying to ease the tension. Tsuyuko bites her lip but nods.

"Yes sir." She quickly answers standing fully and dusting her pants off. Hiruzen smiles, ushering her out of the office.

Unsurprising Tsuyuko is quiet on the walk to his home. He wonders what's going on in her head right now. There is no denying she is a smart girl, on her own right without the interference of the previous incarnation, but adding to that... well it's no wonder why she got on so well with Orochimaru.

He'd made a good choice placing her with him over putting her with her stepfather. While he has no doubt that Sakumo could have been a good influence on her, she needed Orochimaru. But more importantly his own student had needed someone like Tsuyuko as a student. Hiruzen knows that no matter what happens now, the future of the

village is safe with Orochimaru as the next Hokage. He hates to think what could have happened had he made a different choice.

Thankfully he doesn't have to think about such unpleasant things. Not now with hope on the horizon, like a light cresting across the forest floors. Shilling shadows away in their wake, breaking forth a new dawn.

Hiruzen slows to offer his hand to the genin. Tsuyuko gently smiles, taking his hand a moment later. Dusk settles across the far horizon. The Hokage and the serpent's appearance walk in silence together.

"Sensei is probably telling Hatake-san." Tsuyuko whispers once they've arrived within the Saruto estate's courtyard. As if the thought has just occurred to her.

"You're probably right, but we'll pretend for now that we don't know that. Now no more of this discussion tonight. It's time to head inside." The door slides open at just that moment, his eldest son comes barrelling out. Tsuyuko lets go of his hand so he can brace and catch his son.

They are all ushered inside by his wife who claims he's late for dinner. She smiles kindly at Tsuyuko who ducks into a polite bow rather quickly. The action is met with a chuckle and earns the genin a pat on her head from Biwako. Hiruzen thinks this will be good for them both.

Dinner is a quaint affair. His boys think Tsuyuko is the coolest ever, or so says his oldest and his wife seems happy enough to have the young girl at their table. He enjoys the moment while he can. Knowing that tomorrow there will be so much work to do, plans to start.

A new day is just around the corner. A reckoning too, but for now he has time to consider how best to go about removing the weeds. If just for this one moment.

Chapter End Notes

And with that, part one is concluded. I am sure this chapter has left more questions to be answered but I do promise when the reveals for everything left untold will be worth the wait. The reason I'm doing it like this is because there was going to be a time skip in the next bit and then the end and that felt not right for the pacing I've been trying to maintain. I do plan to try to have part two up sometime this summer or maybe even late spring if all goes well.

Thank you all very much for reading! Much love <3

(also i'm no longer doing discord but I do post art for this fic and others over on tumblr @ [xo-queenievee-xo](#) fic updates and artwork can be found there now)

(sidenote: i have no idea why pictures no longer show up in my fics, i'll eventually go back and edit them in if i can)

End Notes

Thank you for reading! I look forward to reading what yall thought of the first chapter of the rewrite <3

Oh and if you want snippets and stuff for upcoming chapter or whatever I have a discord, and as long as you're 18 plus I'd love for you to join and hang out <3

Naruto Fics Discord!

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!